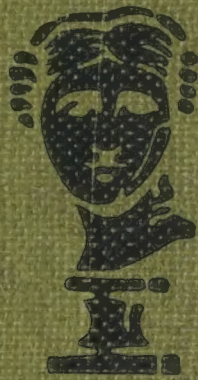


THE BELOVED
TRAITOR *by*
FRANK L. PACKARD



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A Merry Xmas
and Happy New Year.

From Jim to Anna.

THE BELOVÉD TRAITOR



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THAT LITTLE FIGURE THAT WAS SITTING
ON THE STEM OF THE BOAT

The Belovéd Traitor

BY

FRANK L. PACKARD

AUTHOR OF "THE MIRACLE MAN," "GREATER
LOVE HATH NO MAN," ETC.

ILLUSTRATED BY
MODEST STEIN

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BOOK I: BERNAY-SUR-MER

There is a Valley called the Valley of Illusion, but beyond it, sun-crowned, is the Peak of Eternal Truth — and the Way from the Valley to the Peak is sore beset, for the Way is the Understanding of Things Real, and its Achievement is the Fullness of Life.

The Belovéd Traitor

BOOK I: BERNAY-SUR-MER

— I —

THE HOUSE ON THE BLUFF

IT was a wilder gust than any that had gone before. It tore along the beach with maniacal fury; and, shrieking in a high, devilishly-gleeful falsetto, while the joints of the little inn, rheumatic with age, squeaked in its embrace, shook the *Taverne du Bas Rhône* much after the fashion of a terrier shaking a rat. And with that gust, loosening the dilapidated fastening on the casement, a window crashed inward, shattering the pane against the wall.

“*Sacré bleu!*” shouted a man, springing smartly to his feet from his seat at a small table as the rain lashed him. “What a dog of a night!”

Against the opposite wall, tilted back in a chair, Papa Fregeau, the patron, a rotund, aproned little individual, stopped the humming of his song.

“*Tiens!*” said he fatuously. “But it is worse than

that, Alcide, since it is bad for business — hah! Not a franc profit to-night — the Bas Rhône is desolated.” And he resumed his song:

“ In Languedoc, where the wine flows free,
We drink to ——”

“ Hold your bibulous tongue, Jacques Fregeau, and get something with which to fix that window before we are as wet inside as you! ” — it was Madame Fregeau, stout, middle-aged and rosy, already hurrying to the aid of the first speaker, who was wrestling with the dismantled fastening.

Usually the nightly resort of the little fishing village of Bernay-sur-Mer, the Bas Rhône, inn, cabaret, tavern or café, as it was variously styled, now held but two others in the room that was habitually crowded to suffocation. One was a young man, sturdily built, with a tanned, clean-cut face, smooth-shaven save for a small black moustache, whose rumpled black hair straggled in pleasing disarray over his forehead; the other was older, a man of forty, whose skin was bronzed almost to blackness from the Mediterranean sun. Both were in rough fishermen’s dress, sitting at dominoes under the hanging lamp in the centre of the room. On the table, pushed to one side, were the remains of a simple meal of bread and cheese; and from the inside of the loaf, the younger man, somewhat to the detriment of his own game and to the advantage of his opponent, had plucked out a piece of the soft bread, which he had kneaded between his fingers into a plastic lump, and thereafter, with amazing skill and deftness, had been engaged in moulding into little faces, and heads, and figures of various sorts, as he played.

The older man spoke slowly now:

“ It is twenty years since we have had the like —

you do not remember that, Jean? You were too young."

Jean Laparde, an amused smile lurking in his dark eyes as he watched Jacques Fregeau waddle obediently to his wife's side, shook his head.

"I was on the *Étoile* that night," said the other, pulling at his beard. "The good God dealt hardly with us — we lost two when we beached; but not so hardly as with the *Antoinette* — none came to shore from her. It was a night just such as this."

"Ay, that is so," corroborated Papa Fregeau, removing his apron and stuffing it into the broken window pane. "It is, after all, small blame to any one that they stay indoors to-night and forget my profits."

"Profits!" ejaculated Madame Fregeau tartly. "You drink them all up!" She shook her short skirts, damp from her skirmish with the storm, and turned to Jean's companion at the table. "Pray the blessed Virgin," she said softly, crossing herself reverently, "that there be no boats out to-night, Pierre Lachance."

"And God for pity on them if there are!" returned the fisherman. "But there are none from Bernay-sur-Mer, that is sure." He played the last domino before him with a little triumphant flourish. "Ah, Jean, count — you are caught, my boy! It will teach you to pay more attention to the game, and less to the waste of Madame Fregeau's good bread!"

"She is used to that!" smiled Jean Laparde good-naturedly, as he faced his dominoes, disclosing the measure of his defeat, and, pushing back his chair, stood up.

"But," protested the other, "you are not going! We will play again. See, it is early, the clock has but just struck eight."

"Not to-night, Pierre," said Jean, laughing now, as

he began to button his jacket around his throat. "Play with Alcide there."

"Chut!" cried Madame Fregeau, bustling forward, her eyes twinkling. "The little minx will not expect you a night like this — Marie-Louise is too sensible a girl to be piqued for that. You are not going out to-night, Jean, *ma foi!*"

"And why not?" asked Jean innocently. "Why not, Mother Fregeau? What is a little wind, and a little rain, and a little walk along the beach?"

"But a night like this!" sighed Papa Fregeau dolorously, as he joined the group, his forefinger laid facetiously against the side of his stubby little nose. "*Nom d'un nom!* What constancy — what sublime constancy!"

"Ah, you laugh at that, *mon petit bête!*" exclaimed Madame Fregeau sharply, instantly changing front. "You are an old fool, Jacques Fregeau!"

"But I was a young one once, *ma belle* — eh?" insinuated Jacques, pinching his wife's plump cheek, and winking prodigiously at Jean Laparde. "It is of that you are thinking, eh?"

"You are ridiculous!" declared Madame Fregeau, blushing and pushing him away.

"You see, Jean?" said Jacques Fregeau plaintively, shrugging his shoulders. "You see, eh, *mon gaillard?* You see what you are coming to! Oh, *là, là*, once I was young like you, and Lucille, *ma chérie*, here, was like — eh? — like Marie-Louise. You see, eh? You see what you are coming to!"

There was a roar of laughter from the man at the table in the rear, that was echoed in a guffaw by Pierre Lachance, as Jean, leaning suddenly forward, caught Madame Fregeau's comely, motherly face between his hands and kissed her on both cheeks.

“I’d ask for no better luck, Jacques!” he cried — and ran for the door.

Laughing, and with a wave of his hand back at the little group, he opened the door, closed it behind him with a powerful wrench against the wind; and then, outside, stood still for a moment, as though taken utterly by surprise at the abandon of the night. He had not been out before that day. Like all, or nearly all of Bernay-sur-Mer he had remained snugly indoors — for what was a fisherman to do in weather like that! Mend nets? Well, yes, he had mended nets. One must do that. He shrugged his shoulders, making a wry grimace. Nets! But the night was bad — much worse than he had imagined. And yet — yes — the storm was at its height now, but the wind had changed — by morning, thank the saints, it would be better.

It was black about him, inky black — all save a long, straggling, twinkling line of lights from the cottage windows that bordered the beach, and the dull yellow glow from the windows of the Bas Rhône at his side. Around him a veritable bedlam seemed loosed — the wind, like a horde of demons, shrieking, whistling and howling in unholy jubilee; while heavier, more ominous, in a deeper roar came the booming of the surf from where it broke upon the beach but little more than a hundred yards in front of him.

Jean Laparde stood hesitant. It was quite true; Mother Fregeau had been right! Marie-Louise would not expect him to-night, and it was a good mile from the village to the house on the bluff, and yet — he smiled a little, and suddenly, head down, struck out into the storm.

A flash of lightning, jagged, threw the night into a strange, tremulous luminance — the headlands of the little bay; the mighty combers, shaking their foam-

topped crests like manes, hurling themselves in impotent fury at the shore, then spreading in thin creamy layers to lick up wide, irregular patches of the beach; the sweep of the Mediterranean, so slow to anger, but a tumbling rage of waters now as far as the eye could reach; the whitewashed cottages; boats, dark objects without form or shape, drawn far up on the sand; the pale, yellowish-green of the sward stretching away behind the village; the road beneath his feet a pool of mud — and then blackness again, utter, impenetrable, absolute.

Jean passed the last of the cottages — there were but four on that side of the Bas Rhône — and kept on, following the curve of the beach toward the eastern headland. But now, the lightness of spirit that had been with him but a few moments before was gone, and a restlessness, bordering on depression, took its place. What was it? The storm? No; it could not very well be that, for it had come often to him before, unbidden, unwelcomed, that same mood — even in the glorious sunlight, even in the midst of song as he fished the blue, sparkling waters that, more than anything else, had been his home ever since he could remember. It seemed, and it was a very strange and absurd fancy, but it was always the same, that a voice, wordless, without sound, talked speciously to him, talked him into a state of discontent that robbed him of all delight in his work, his environment and his surroundings, and, arrived at that stage, would suddenly bid him peremptorily to follow — and that was all. Follow! Where? He did not know. It made him angry, but it did not in any way lighten the mood that was forced upon him in spite of himself.

And now, as it always came, unsought and unexpected, this mood was upon him again; and, as he

plunged through the storm, drawing the collar of his jacket more closely around his throat against the sheets of rain, he fought with himself to shake it off. It was absurd. And why should he be unhappy for something that was absurd? That was still more absurd! He was not sick, there was nothing the matter with him. He was strong — none was stronger than he, and he had matched himself against them all in Bernay-sur-Mer. True, it was a hard life, and there were not riches to be found in the nets — but there were friends — he was rich in friends — all Bernay-sur-Mer was his friend. There were the Fregeaus, with whom he had lived at the Bas Rhône for over ten years now since his father had died. Madame Fregeau was a mother to him, and Jacques was the biggest-hearted man in the whole south of France. And, *mon Dieu!* — he began to smile now — there were — should he name every family in the village? — even to the children for whom he made the clay *poupées*, the dolls that in their play lives were, in turn, veritable children to them? Ah, to be in ugly mind — it was no less than a sin! There were candles to burn for that, and the good Father Anton would have a word to say if he knew! And best of all — there was Marie-Louise. There was none, none *pardieu*, in the whole wide sweep of France like Marie-Louise, with her eyes like stars, and her face fresh as the morning breeze across the sparkling waters, and a figure so beautiful, so lithe, so strong! What charm to see those young arms on the oars, the bosom heave, to feel the boat bound forward under the stroke, and hear her laugh ring out with the pure joy of life!

“Marie-Louise!” cried Jean Laparde aloud — and the wind seemed to catch up the words and echo them in a triumphant shout: “Marie-Louise!”

It was gone — that mood. And now, with the village well behind him, the lights blotted out and seeming to have left him isolated even from human proximity, another came — and he stood still — and this time it was the storm. And something within him, without will or volition of his, spontaneous, leapt out in consonance with the wild grandeur of the night to revel in it, atune with the Titanic magnificence of the spectacle, as one who gazes upon a splendid canvas and, innate in appreciation, is lost in the conception to which the master brush has given life. And so he stood there for a long time immovable, his shoulders thrust a little forward, the rain streaming from his face, his eyes afire, wrapt, lost in the clashing elements before him — and fancy came. The play of the lightning was more vivid now, and the coast line took on changing shapes, as though seeking by new and swiftly conceived formations to foil and combat and thrust back and parry the furious attack of the breakers that hurled themselves onward in their mad, never-ending charge; while behind again, in sudden apparitions, like spectre battalions massed in reserve, the white cottages appeared for an instant, and then, as though seeking a more strategic position, vanished utterly, until a flame-tongue crackling across the heavens searched them out again, laying their position bare once more; and the headlands, vanguards where the fight was hottest, were lost in a smother of spume and spray, like the smoke of battle swirling over them — and it was battle, and the thunder of the surf was the thunder of belching cannon, and the shriek of the wind was the shriek of hurtling shells. It was battle — and some consciousness inborn in Jean Laparde awakened and filled him with understanding, and in the terror

and dismay and awe and strife and fierce elation was the great allegory of life, and suddenly he knew a lowly reverence for Him who had depicted this, and a joy, full of a strange indefinable yearning, in the divine genius of its execution.

"It is the great art of the *bon Dieu*," said Jean simply.

And after a little while he went forward on his way again.

The road led upward now in a gentle slope toward higher land, though still following the line of the beach. Near the extremity of the headland was the cottage that the village always called the "house on the bluff," and in a moment now he should be able to see the light. There was always a light there every night, in good weather and in stormy — and never in fourteen years had it been otherwise, not since the night that Marie-Louise's father, the brother of old Gaston Bernier, steering for the headland in a gale had miscalculated his position and been drowned on the Perigeau Reef. From that day it had become a religion with Gaston, a sacred rite, that light; and, in time, it had become an institution in Bernay-sur-Mer — not a fisherman in the village now but steered by it, not one but that, failing to sight it, would have taken it for granted that he was off his course and would have put about, braving even the wildest weather, until he had picked it up.

The light! Jean smiled to himself. He was very wet, but he had found a most wonderful joy in the storm — and, besides, what did a little wetting matter? In a few minutes now Marie-Louise would cry out in delight at seeing him, and he would fling off his drenched jacket and pull up a chair to the stove be-

side old Gaston, and they would light their pipes, and Marie-Louise would prepare the spiced wine, and — he halted as though stunned.

He had reached the big rock where the road made its second turn and ran directly to the house — and there was no light. It was the exact spot from which he should first be able to see it — a hundred times, on a hundred nights, he had looked for it, and found it there — by the turning at the big rock. He dashed the rain from his face with a sweep of his hand, and strained his eyes into the blackness. There was nothing there — only the blackness. He reached out mechanically and touched the rock, as though to assure himself that *it* was there — and then he laughed a little unnaturally. There must be some mistake — for fourteen years that light had burned in the window, and it could be seen from this point on the road — there must be some mistake. Perhaps just another step would bring it into view!

And then, as he moved forward, something cold gripped at Jean's heart. There was no mistake — the light was out for the first time in fourteen years! The light that old Gaston had never failed to burn since the night his brother died, the light that had become a part of the man himself — was out! Was he ill — sick? Why, then, had Marie-Louise not lighted it? She had done it before, often and often before. But now neither one nor the other had lighted it, and they, just the two of them, were the only occupants of the house — Marie-Louise and her old uncle. Just the two of them — and the light was out!

Jean was running now, smashing his way along the road through the clayey mud and water, splashing it to his knees, buffeting against the wind; and, with every step, the sense of dread that had settled upon him grew

heavier. It was no ordinary thing this! Old Gaston would have lighted the lamp while there remained strength in his body to do it; it was a sacred trust that he had imposed upon himself which had grown more inviolable as the years had crept upon him and he had grown older. It brought fear to Jean, and the greater stab at the thought of Marie-Louise. Things were wrong — and what was wrong with one was wrong with both. Was it not Marie-Louise who polished the great lamp chimney so zealously every morning and filled the big, dented brass bowl of the lamp with oil; and was it not Marie-Louise who watched with affectionate understanding each evening as her uncle lighted it?

A shadowy mass, the house, loomed suddenly out of the darkness before him. It seemed to give him added speed, and in another moment he was at the door — and the door was open, wide open, blown inward with the wind.

“Marie-Louise!” he shouted, as he rushed inside. “Gaston! Gaston!” And again: “Marie-Louise!”

There was no answer — no sound but the shriek of wind, the groaning of the house timbers in travail with the storm. He pushed the door shut behind him, and something like a sob came from Jean’s lips — and then he shouted once more.

Still there was no answer.

He felt his way to the kitchen, and across the kitchen to the shelf by the rear wall, found a candle, and lighted it. He held the flame above his head, sweeping the light about him, and, discovering nothing, ran back into the front room — and, with a low cry, stood still. On the floor the great lamp lay broken, the chimney shattered into splinters. He stared at it in a frightened, almost superstitious way. The great lamp

broken! Did it mean that — no, no, it could not mean that! It was the wind that had blown it there in bursting in the door. See, there was no disorder anywhere! He ran into Gaston's room. Nothing! Nothing anywhere to indicate that anything had happened — and yet, apparently, the house was empty — and that was enough! Out? They had gone out somewhere, even in the storm, on some homely errand, to pay a visit perhaps? Impossible! With the lamp for the first time in fourteen years unlighted, and broken now upon the floor? It was impossible! While Gaston Bernier lived the light would burn!

He climbed the stairs and stood on the threshold of the little attic room, the flickering candle playing timorously with the darker shadows where the roof in its sharp angle spread into an inverted V. It was the first time he had ever looked into that room. It was Marie-Louise's room. It was all white, scrupulously white, from the bare floor to the patched quilt on the little bed. There was a freshness, a sweetness about it that seemed to personify Marie-Louise, to fill the room with her — and it swept him now with a sudden numbing agony, and his face, wet with the rain that dripped from the hair straggling over his forehead, showed grey and set as it glistened curiously in the yellow, sputtering candle light.

And then, half mad with anxiety, the sure, intuitive knowledge of disaster upon him, he rushed downstairs again; and, hurriedly exchanging his candle for a lantern, went out into the night.

A search around the house revealed no more than within. He ran then down the path to the beach, to where, well up under the protection of the low bluff and away from the reach of the highest tide, old Gaston stored his boats and fishing gear. And there, as

Jean flashed his lantern around him, a low, strained cry, for the second time, came from his lips. Three boats old Gaston owned — who should know better than he, Jean Laparde, who fished with the other season after season! — but of the three boats only two were there upon the beach.

As a man wounded then and dazed with his hurt, Jean stood there. They had gone — out into that — Marie-Louise and old Gaston — and they had not come back. It was not true — it was beyond belief! No; it was not true — something only had happened to the boat — no man in Bernay-sur-Mer would have been so mad as to have ventured out!

Far to the south the heavens opened in a burst of flame, and, travelling far and fast, a zigzag tongue of lightning, like the venomous thrust of a serpent's fang, leaped across the skies. It lighted up the beach, and, further out over the waters, a quarter of a mile away, played upon the smother of spray that like a shroud flung itself over the Perigeau Reef — and the cry that came from Jean Laparde was wild, hoarse-throated now. What was that he had seen!

It was dark again out there. He swung his lantern, signalling frantically — then, holding it high and rigid, waited for the next flash.

It came.

“Marie-Louise,” he whispered through white lips.

Far out on the extremity of the reef, a figure stood silhouetted against the spray for an instant — and blackness fell again.

— II —

THE KEEPERS OF THE LIGHT

FOR a moment's space Jean stood there measuring, as it were, the sweep of waters, as one might measure the strength of some antagonist thrust suddenly upon him — and then, turning, he ran back to the boats, and began to drag one down the beach.

No man in all Bernay-sur-Mer would dare to venture out. He had said that himself — but there was no thought of that now. Marie-Louise was on the Perigeau Reef. He was strong, strong as a young bull, and he tugged now at the heavy boat with the added nervous strength of a man near mad with desperation, heaving it swiftly across the sand. At high tide even in calm weather the Perigeau was awash — in storm, far better to plunge into the water than to be pounded to death upon those *diable* rocks, lifted up and pounded upon the rocks, and lifted up and pounded again, when the water should be high. At ten o'clock it would be full tide. Thanks to the *bon Dieu* it was not eight o'clock when the water would be at its height, or else —

“*Sacré nom d'un nom, d'un nom*” — Jean was grinding words from between his teeth. They came utterly without volition, utterly meaningless, utterly spontaneous from the brain afire.

It was the lee of the headland, and it was the mercy of the *Sainte Vierge* that it was so; otherwise, *baptême*

de baptême! no boat could live where a fish would drown. But it was the smoother water of a mill-race — in with the tide, out with the tide — between the headland and the Perigeau it was like that.

With a wrench, Jean swung the boat around — he had been dragging it by the stern — and, at the water's edge now, the dying efforts of a spent and broken wave wrapped and curled around the bow in creamy foam. Then, racing up the beach once more to the shelter of the bluff, he knelt there to plant his lantern in the sand, ballasting it securely with rocks, flung his jacket down beside it, and ran back to the water's edge again.

He shoved the boat further out until it was half afloat, shipped the oars — and waited, steadying the craft with an iron grip on the gunwales. A wave lifted her, the water swirled around his knees, seethed behind him, rushed back hissing sharply in its retreat — and Jean, bending, shoved with all his strength, as he sprang aboard.

The boat shot out on the receding wave, and, as he flung himself upon the seat, smashed into the next on-coming breaker, wavered, half turned, righted under a mighty tug at the oars, engulfed herself in a sheet of spray — and slid onward down into the bubbling hollow.

None in Bernay-sur Mer was a better boatman than Jean Laparde, and Bernay-sur-Mer in that respect held its head above all Languedoc; for at the water fêtes now for three years had not Jean Laparde secured to it the coveted *prix!* But to-night it was a different race that lay before him.

For a little way, while the lee of the headland held, a child almost, once the boat was free of the broken surf on the beach, might have held the craft to her course — but only for that little way. For fifty yards

perhaps the boat leapt forward, straight as an arrow, heading well above the Perigeau Reef — and then suddenly the lighted lantern on the beach seemed to travel seaward at an incredible speed, as the onrush of tide, wind and sea through the narrows caught the boat, twisted it like a cork, and, high-borne on a wave-crest, hurled it along past the shoreline toward the lower end of the bay — and the twinkling lantern was blotted out from sight. Tight-lipped, his muscles cracking with the strain, Jean forced the boat around again, and the tough oars bent under his strokes.

There were two ways to the Perigeau Reef — he had thought of both of them. One, to go down in the shelter of the headland to the lower end of the bay, circuit the shore-line there until he was free of the mill-race through the narrows, then pull straight out for the Perigeau — only, the *bon Dieu* knew well, no man was strong enough for that; it was too far, for the bay on this side, deeper than on the other side of the headland by Bernay-sur-Mer, extended inward for nearly two miles, and to pull back that distance against the full force of the storm — only a madman would try it, and no boat would live! The other way was the only chance — the quarter mile across the narrows.

A quarter mile! He pulled on and on, minute after minute that were as endless periods of time; and whether he was making progress or losing it he did not know, only that with each minute his strength was being taxed to the utmost, until it seemed to be ebbing from him, until his arms in their sockets caused him brutal pain. And it was all like a black veil that wrapped itself about him now, blacker than it had ever been before that night — the loss of that tiny guiding light he had left upon the beach seemed to make it so, and seemed to try to rob him of his courage because it was

gone. The never-ending roar of buffeting sea and surf was in his ears until his head rang with the sound — the waves pounded his boat and tossed it like a chip upon their crests, and slopped aboard and sloshed at his feet — and they thundered upon the shore, and upon the headland, and they were mocking at him. The lightning came again — it lighted up the house upon the bluff and with bitter dismay he saw that, too, was sweeping seaward — it flickered a ghostly radiance upon dancing shore shapes — it played upon a tumbling wall of water, onrushing, towering above his head from where the boat quivered in the trough far down below. And at sight of this, like a madman, Jean Laparde pulled then — up — up — up — the crest was curling, snarling its vengeance before it broke — and then it seethed away in a great trail of murmuring foam that lapped at the boat's sides and crept in over the gunwales. And there were many more like that, so many that they were countless — and they never stopped — and they were stronger than he — and there was always another — and each was greater than the one before — and he sobbed at last in utter weakness over the oars.

Marie-Louise, Gaston, the Perigeau, all were living before him in a daze now — the brain became subordinate to the bodily exhaustion. There was only a jumbled medley of hell and death and eternal struggle around him, and a subconsciousness that for him too the end had come — the good Father Anton would say a requiem mass for him — and Bernay-sur-Mer would tell its children that Jean would never make any more of the clay *poupées* for them — and the children would cry — and it was all very droll.

He pulled on, mechanically, doggedly. His face was wrinkled where the muscles twisted in pain, drops

that were not rain nor spray stood out in great beads upon his forehead, his back seemed breaking, his arms useless things that writhed with the strain upon them.

Wild thoughts came to him. Why should he struggle there against the pitiless strength that was greater than his, until he could no longer even meet the waves with the bow of his boat, until they would turn him over and over and afterwards roll him upon the shore, where Papa Fregeau, perhaps, would find him! See, it would be a very easy matter to stop while he had yet a little strength left to guide the boat — and run with the waves — and it would rest him — and by the time he got to the shore he would be quite strong enough again to fight his way through the breakers. His lips moved, teeth working over them, biting into them, tinging them with blood. It came out of this hell and these storm devils around him, that thought! Marie-Louise was waiting, was she not, upon the Perigeau — and when the tide was high and the sea was calm one could row over the Perigeau, and sometimes see a *dragonet*, with the beautiful blue and yellow marking on its white scaleless body, looking for food in the rock crevices out of its curious eyes that were in the top of its head!

A flicker of light! Yes — yes — the lantern! He was abreast of it again. The good God had not deserted him! He was still strong — there was iron in his arms again — the torture of pulling was gone. He could feel the boat lift now to the stroke.

He pulled, taking his breath in catchy sobs. The boat swept downward into a great trough, rose again, trembling, balancing on the next crest — and the light had disappeared. A cry gurgled from Jean's throat, impotent, full of anguish. It was an hallucination, a torture of the devil! No! There it was once more — he caught it on the next rise, and each succeeding one

now. And he, not it now, was making headway seaward. He was across the tide-race, it was the Madonna who had prayed for him! and in another little while, soon now, just as soon as the lantern showed a little further astern, he would get the lee of the Perigeau itself — it would be broken water, but it would be like a child's effort then. And that! — what was that!

“Jean!” — it came ringing down with the wind, a brave, strong voice. “*Jean!*”

It was Marie-Louise! His strength was the strength of a god again. He shot a hurried glance over his shoulder — it was done — but one had need for care that the boat should not thrash itself to pieces on the rocks. Yes; he saw her now — like a dark, wind-swept wraith.

“To the right, Jean — there is landing to the right!” she called.

“Ay!” he shouted back; and, standing, swung in the boat.

The bow touched the edge of the rocks, grated, pounded, receded, and came on again — there was no beach here — only the vicious swirl and chop of the back-eddy. But as the keel touched again, Jean sprang over into the water; and as he sprang, a figure from the rocks rushed in waist deep to grasp the boat's gunwale on the other side — and across the bow, very close to him, Marie-Louise's white face was framed in the night. It was very dark, he could not see her features distinctly, but he had never seen Marie-Louise look like that before — it was not that her face was aged, nothing, *bon Dieu!* could take the springtime from that face, but it was very tired, and frightened, and glad, and full of grief.

“Jean, ah, Jean, you —” the wind carried away her

words. Then she shouted louder, a curious break, like a half sob, in her voice. "Uncle Gaston is hurt — very, very badly hurt. He is up there a little way on the reef. You must carry him. And if you hurry, Jean, I can hold the boat."

"Gaston — hurt!" he cried in dismay. "You are sure then you can hold the boat, and —"

"Yes, yes, if you hurry, Jean — he is there, a few yards back, a little to the left."

"Guard yourself then that it does not pull you off your feet!" he cautioned anxiously, and began to scramble from the water and up the slippery, weeded rocks.

And then, a few yards back on the ledge, as she had said, just out of the reach of the spray that lashed the windward side of the Perigeau, he came upon an outstretched form — and, kneeling, called the other's name:

"Gaston! It is I — Jean Laparde!" He bent closer — one could not hear for the *diable* wind! "Gaston!" There was only a low moaning — the man was unconscious. "'*Cré nom d'une forte peine!*" muttered Jean, with a sinking heart, and picked up the other tenderly in his arms.

But it was not easy, that little way back to the boat. Burdened now, the wind behind his back sent him staggering forward before he could find footing, and ten times in the dozen steps he lurched, slipped and all but fell before, close to the boat again, he laid Gaston down upon the rocks.

"We must bale out the boat, Marie-Louise," he shouted, wading quickly into the water; "or with what we take in on the way back she will not ride. See, I will hold it while you bale — it will be easier for you."

She answered something as she set instantly to work,

but her words were lost in the storm. And Jean, through the darkness, as he gripped at the boat, watched her, his mind a sea of turmoil like the turmoil of the sea about him. Gaston was hurt — yes, very badly hurt, it would seem — how had it happened? — how had they come, Marie-Louise and Gaston, to be upon the Perigeau? — and he, who had given up hope, who had thought to perish out there in that crossing, he, too, was on the Perigeau — the way to get back was to run straight in with the bay — it would not be so hard if they could out-race the waves — if the waves came in over the stern it would be to swamp and — God had been very good to let them live and —

Marie-Louise's hand closed over his on the gunwale.

"It is done, Jean — what I could do," she said. "I will hold the boat again while you lift Uncle Gaston in."

And suddenly Jean's heart was very full.

"Marie-Louise, Marie-Louise!" he said hoarsely — and while her hands grasped the rocking boat, his crept around the wet shoulders for an instant, and to her face, and turned the face upward to his, and, in that wild revelry of storm, kissed her; and with a choked sob he went from her then and picked up the unconscious form upon the rocks.

And so they started back.

There was no sweep of tide to battle with now — the waves bore them high and shot them onward, shoreward; and the storm was wings to them. But there was danger yet; on the top of the crests it was like a pivot, each one threatening to whirl them broadside and capsize them on the breathless rush down the steep slope that yawned below — that, and the fear that the downward rush, breathless as it was, would not be fast enough to escape the crest itself, which, following

them always, hanging over them like hesitant doom far up above, trembling, twisting, writhing, might break in a seething torrent and, sweeping over them, engulf them. It was not so hard now, the way back, there was not the pitiless current that numbed the soul because the body was so frail; but all the craft Jean knew, all the strength that was his was in play again.

The boat swept onward. Marie-Louise was crouched in the stern supporting Gaston's head upon her lap. Jean could not see her face. When he dared take his eyes for an instant from the racing waves behind her, he looked at her, but he could not see her face — it was bent always over Gaston's head. And a fear grew heavy in Jean's heart — the old fisherman had not moved since he, Jean, had found the other on the reef. Once he shouted at Marie-Louise, shouted out the fear that was upon him — but she only shook her head.

The rain had stopped — he noticed the fact with a strange shock of surprise — surprise that he had not noticed it before, as though it were something extraneous to his surroundings. And then he remembered that as he had stood outside the Bas Rhône he had seen that the wind had changed, and had told himself that by morning it would be better weather. He glanced above him. The storm wrack was still there; but it was broken now, and the low, flying clouds seemed thinner — yes, by morning it would be bright sunshine, and of the storm only the heavy sea would be left.

He gave his eyes to the tumbling waters again — and, suddenly, with a great cry, began to pull until it seemed his arms must break. Roaring behind them, a giant wave was on the point of breaking — closer it came — closer — he yelled to Marie-Louise:

“Hold fast, Marie-Louise! Hold fast!”

And then it was upon them.

For a moment it was a vortex — a white, swirling flood of water churned to lather. It hid the stern of the boat, hid Marie-Louise and Gaston at her feet, as it poured upon them — and the boat, lifted high up, hung dizzily for an instant, poised as on the edge of an abyss, then the wave rolled under them, and the boat swept on in its wake, the shipped water rushing now this way now that in the bottom.

It was an escape! The blessed saints still had them in their keeping! Jean sucked in his breath. A foot nearer when the wave had broken, and, instead of the few bucketsful they had taken, the boat would have filled! And now Marie-Louise, already baling at the water, cried out to him.

“See! It was a mercy!” — her voice rang with a glad uplift. “It was sent by the *bon Dieu*, that wave! It has brought life to Uncle Gaston!”

It was true. The deluge of water had, temporarily at least, restored the old fisherman to consciousness, for he raised himself up now, and Jean heard him speak.

After that, time marked no definite passing for Jean. Occasionally he heard Marie-Louise’s voice as she spoke to her uncle; and occasionally he heard the old fisherman reply — but that was all. In nearer the shore, where the current rushing through the narrows had lost its potency, he edged the boat across the heavy sea, gained the comparative calm under the lee of the headland, and began to work back to the upper end — it was easier that way, difficult and slow as the progress was, than to land and carry old Gaston along the beach. An hour? It might have been that — or two — or half an hour — when he and Marie-Louise, in

the water beside him again, and close by where the lantern under the bluff still burned as he had left it, were dragging the boat free from the breakers and up upon the sand.

And then, while Marie-Louise ran for the lantern, Jean leaned over into the boat.

"Gaston!" he called. "See, we are back! Can you hear me?"

"Yes," Gaston answered feebly.

"Then put your arms around my neck, *mon brave*, and I will lift you up."

The arms rose slowly, clasped; and Jean, straightening up, was holding the other as a woman holds a child. Gaston's head fell on his shoulder, and the old fisherman whispered weakly in his ear.

"My side, Jean — hold me — lower — down."

"But, yes," Jean answered cheerily. "There — is that better. We shall get easily to the house like this, and Marie-Louise" — she was back again now — "will lead the way with the lantern."

Gaston's only answer was a slight pressure of his arm around Jean's neck — but now, as the lantern's rays for an instant fell upon the other's features, Jean's own face set like stone. The old fisherman's eyes were closed, and the skin, where it showed through the grizzled beard, wet and tangled now, was a deathly white — and Jean, motioning to Marie-Louise, started hurriedly forward.

Only once on the way to the house, as Jean followed Marie-Louise up the path from the beach, did Gaston speak again; and then it was as though he were talking to himself, his tones low and broken, almost like the sobbing of a child. Jean caught the words.

"René — René, my brother — the light is out, René — the light is out."

And with the words, something dimmed suddenly before Jean's eyes, and the path, for a moment, and Marie-Louise were as a mist in front of him. The light! For fourteen years the man he held in his arms had burned that light — and the light was out now forever.

He hurried on, and, reaching the house, laid Gaston on the bed in the little room off the kitchen that belonged to the other; then turned swiftly to Marie-Louise, for the old fisherman had lost consciousness again.

"Cognac, Marie-Louise!" he said quickly.

She ran for the brandy — and while Jean forced a few drops through Gaston's lips, holding up the lantern to watch the other, she went from the room again and brought back a lamp.

"Jean," she cried pitifully, as she set it upon the table, "he is not —"

Jean shook his head.

"No; he will be better in a minute now. It is but a little fainting spell."

She did not answer — barefooted, the short skirt just reaching to the ankles, her black hair, loosened, tumbling about her shoulders in a sodden mass, she came a little closer to the bed, her hands clasped, the dark eyes wide with troubled tenderness, the red lips parted, the white cheeks still glistening with spray; and, unconscious of her pose, the wet clothes, untrammelled in their simplicity, clinging closely to her limbs and her young rounded bosom, revealed in chaste freedom the perfect contour and beauty of her form.

Something stirred Jean's spirit within him, and for a moment he was oblivious to his surroundings; for, as he looked, she seemed to stand before him the living counterpart of a wondrous piece of sculpture, in bronze

it was, marvellously conceived, that he had dreamed of again and again in vague, restless dreams — the statue, for it was always the same statue in his dreams, that was set in the midst of a great city, in a great square, and —

“ Marie-Louise ! ” he said aloud unconsciously.

But she shook her head, pointing to the bed.

Gaston had stirred, and, opening his eyes now, fixing them on the glass still held in Jean’s hand, he motioned for more brandy. And Jean, his moment of abstraction gone as quickly as it had come, bent hastily forward and gave it to him.

The raw spirit brought a flush to the old fisherman’s cheeks.

“ Father Anton,” he said. “ Go for Father Anton.”

“ *Bien sûr !* ” responded Jean soothingly. “ I will go at once. It was what I thought of when I was carrying you up the beach. I said: ‘ Since there is no doctor in Bernay-sur-Mer, I will get Father Anton, who is as good a doctor as he is a priest, and he will have Gaston here on his feet again by morning.’ ” He moved away from the bed — but Gaston put out his hand and stopped him.

“ Not you, Jean; I want to talk to you — Marie-Louise will go.”

“ Marie-Louise ! ” exclaimed Jean, shaking his head. “ But no ! You have forgotten the storm, Gaston — and, see, she is all wet and tired, and she has been, I do not know how many hours, exposed out there on that curséd Perigeau.”

A smile, half stubborn, half of pride, struggled through a twist of pain on the old fisherman’s lips.

“ And what of that ! She has been brought up to it. A dozen times and more she has been longer in a storm

than this. She is not of the milk-and-water breed is Marie-Louise, she is a Bernier, and, the *bon Dieu* be praised, the Berniers do not stop for that! Is it not so, Marie-Louise?"

"Yes, uncle," she answered softly. "I will go; and I will not be long."

"Go then, Marie-Louise," he said. "I wish it."

She bent and kissed him, and picked up the lantern, and shook her head in a pretty gesture at Jean, as though half to tease him for the perturbed look upon his face, and half in grave wistfulness to charge him with the sick man's care — and then she went from the room, and presently the front door closed behind her.

The lamp flickered with the inrush of wind from the opening of the door — flickered over a spotless bare floor, an incongruous high-poster bed that had been a wedding gift to Marie-Louise's father and mother from the man who lay upon it now, flickered over the raftered ceiling, the scant furnishings which were a single chair and a table, flickered over a crucifix upon the wall — and then burned on once more in a steady flame. It was like the shrug of Jean's shoulders, the flicker of that lamp; for, with the shrug, he resumed again his former position over Gaston — it was true after all, Marie-Louise would come to no harm, they were used to that, they fisherfolk of Bernay-sur-Mer.

"*Tiens*, Gaston!" he said. "See, we will get off your wet clothes, and you will tell me how it happened this *misère*, and about the hurt. But first this — *mon Dieu!* — but I did not guess it was like that — a clean bandage, eh? — that is first — I will find something" — he had unbuttoned the other's jacket, disclosing a rent shirt, and, on the left side, a wad of cloth, blood-soaked now, where Marie-Louise evidently had made a pad for the wound with her underskirt, and had tied

it in place with long strips torn from the garment. He began to loosen one of the strips; but Gaston, who until then had lain passive with eyes closed, caught his hand.

"Let it alone, Jean — you will only make it bleed the more."

"Ay," agreed Jean thoughtfully; "perhaps that is so. It would be better maybe to leave it for Father Anton."

A wan smile came to Gaston's lips.

"Father Anton will not touch it either, Jean."

And then Jean, with a sudden start, stared into the other's eyes.

"It is destiny!" said Gaston slowly. "Did you, too, like Marie-Louise, think it was for that I sent for the good father? It is the priest and Mother Church I need, there is no doctor that could help."

"But, no!" Jean protested anxiously. "You must not talk like that, Gaston! It is not so! Wait! You will see! Father Anton will tell you that in a few days you will be strong again. It is the weakness now."

Gaston shook his head.

"You are a brave man, Jean, but I, too, am brave — and I am not afraid — not afraid for myself — it is for Marie-Louise — it is for that I kept you here and sent her for Father Anton. I know — something is hurt inside — I am bleeding there."

And now Jean made no answer — no words would come. The utter weakness in the voice, the feeble movements of the hands, the greyer pallor in the other's face seemed to dawn upon him with its full significance for the first time — and for a moment it seemed to stun and bewilder him.

"It is destiny!" said Gaston again. "Listen! It is fourteen years since René, my brother, Marie-

Louise's father, was drowned on the Perigeau. I swore that night that through neither God nor devil should another lose his life as René had — and for fourteen years I burned the light, and laughed at the Perigeau as it gnawed its teeth in the storms." He stopped, and touched his lips with the tip of his tongue. "It is the hand of God," he whispered hoarsely. "The light is out — and it is the Perigeau again."

Jean pulled the chair closer to the bed, and took one of Gaston's hands.

"It means nothing that, Gaston," he said, trying to control his voice. "It is bad to think such thoughts — and of what good are they? You must not think of that. Tell me what happened, how you and Marie-Louise came to be out there to-night."

Gaston lay quiet for a little while — so long that Jean thought the other had not heard the question. Then the old fisherman spoke again.

"Marie-Louise will tell you. I have other things to say, and I have not strength enough for all. It is hard to talk. Give me the cognac again, Jean."

He drank almost greedily this time, and, as Jean held up his head that he might do so the more readily, the grim old lips and unflinching eyes smiled back their thanks.

"Listen to me well, Jean," he went on earnestly. "Marie-Louise is very dear to me. I love the little girl. All her life she has lived with me — for two years after she was born in this house here, her mother and René and I — and two years more with René and I — and then, after that, it was just Marie-Louise and I alone. She had no one else — and I had no one else. I have taught her as the *bon Dieu* has shown me the way to teach her to be a true daughter of France — to love God and be never afraid. Jean" — he reached

out his other hand suddenly and clasped it over Jean's — "do you love Marie-Louise?"

"Yes," said Jean simply.

"She will be alone now," said Gaston, and his eyes filled. "She is a good girl, Jean. She is pure and innocent, and her heart is so full of love, there was never such love as hers, and she is so gay and bright like the flowers and like the birds — and happy — and sorrow has not come to her." He stopped once more, and the grey eyes searched Jean's face as though they would read to the other's soul. "Jean," he asked again, "do you love Marie-Louise?"

Jean's lips were quivering now.

"Yes," he answered. "You know I love her."

The old fisherman lay back, silent, still for a moment, but he kept pressing Jean's hand. When he spoke again, it seemed that it was with more of an effort.

"This house, the land, the boats, the nets, they are hers — it is her *dot*. But it is not of that, I fear — it is not of that —" his voice died away. Again he was silent; and then, suddenly, raising himself on his elbow: "Jean," he asked for the third time, almost fiercely now, "do you love Marie-Louise?"

"But yes, Gaston," said Jean gently. "I have loved her all my life."

"Yes; it is so," Gaston muttered slowly. "I give her to you then, Jean — she is a gift to you from the sea — from the sea to-night. She loves you, Jean — she has told me so. You will be good to her, Jean?"

The tears were in Jean's eyes.

"Gaston, can you ask it?" he cried out brokenly.

"Ay!" said Gaston, and his voice rang out in a strange, stern note, and his form, as he lifted himself up once more, seemed to possess again its old rugged

strength. "Ay — I do more than ask it. Swear it, Jean! To a dying man and in God's presence, see, there is a crucifix there, swear that you will guard her and that you will let no harm come to her."

"I swear it, Gaston," said Jean, in a choking voice.

"It is well, then," Gaston murmured — and lay back upon the bed.

For a little while, Jean, dim-eyed, watched the other, a hundred reminiscences of their work together stabbing at his heart, and then he rose and began to remove what he could of the old fisherman's clothing.

"I will not touch the wound, Gaston," he said; "but the boots, *mon brave*, and —"

Gaston did not answer. He appeared to have sunk into a semi-stupor, from which even the removal of his clothes did not arouse him. Jean pulled a blanket up around the other's form, and sat down again in the chair.

Once, as Gaston muttered, Jean leaned forward toward the other.

"It is destiny — the Perigeau — the light is out — René, it is —" The words trailed off into incoherency.

The minutes passed. Occasionally, with a spoon now, Jean poured a few drops of brandy between Gaston's lips; otherwise, he sat there, his head in his hands, tight-lipped, staring at the floor. Outside, that vicious howl of wind seemed to have died away — perhaps it was hushed because old Gaston was like this — Marie-Louise had been gone a long time — presently she and Father Anton would be back, and —

He looked up to find Gaston's eyes open and fixed upon him feverishly, the lips struggling to say something.

"What is it, Gaston?" he asked.

"The light, Jean," Gaston whispered. "It is — for — the last time. Go and — light — the — great lamp."

"Yes, Gaston," Jean answered, and went from the room — but at the door he covered his face with his hands, and his shoulders shook like a child whose heart is broken, as his feet in that outer room crunched on the shattered glass of the lamp that would never burn again. He dashed the tears from his eyes, and for a moment stared unseeingly before him, then turned and went back to Gaston's side again in the inner room.

Gaston's eyes searched his face eagerly.

"It burns?" he cried out.

"It burns," said Jean steadily.

And Gaston smiled, and the stupor fell upon him again.

And then after a long time Jean heard footsteps without, then the opening of the front door — and then it seemed to Jean that a benediction had fallen upon the room.

Framed in the doorway, a little worn black bag in his hand, his *soutane* splashed high with mud though it was caught up now around his waist with a cord, stood Father Anton, the beloved of all Bernay-sur-Mer. And, as he stood there and the kindly blue eyes searched the figure on the bed, the fine old face, under its crown of silver hair, grew very grave — and without moving from his position he beckoned to Jean.

"Jean, my son," he said softly, "make our little Marie-Louise here put on dry clothing. I will be a little while with Gaston alone."

Marie-Louise was standing behind the priest. Father Anton stepped aside for Jean to pass — and then the door closed quietly.

"Jean!"—she caught his arm. "Jean—tell me!"

Jean did not answer—there were no words with which to answer her.

"Oh, Jean!" she said—and a little sob broke her voice.

"Go and put on dry things, Marie-Louise," he said.

"No—not now," she answered. "Give me your hand."

They stood there in the darkness. He felt her hand tremble. Neither spoke. Father Anton's voice, in a low, constant murmur, came to them now.

Her hand tightened.

"I know," she said. "It is the Sacrament."

"He said he had taught you to be never afraid," said Jean.

Her hand tightened again.

It was a long while. And then the door behind them opened, and Father Anton came between them, and drew Marie-Louise's head to his bosom and stroked her hair, and placed his other arm around Jean's shoulders—and for a moment he stood like that—and then he drew them to the window.

"See, my children," he said gently, "there are the stars, and there is peace after the storm. It is so with sorrow, for out of the blackness of grief God brings us comfort in His own good pleasure. He has called Gaston home."

— III —

THE BEACON

IT was half clay, half mud; but out of it one could fashion the little *poupées*, the dolls for the children. They would not last very long, it was true; but then one fashioned them quickly, and there was delight in making them.

Jean dug a piece of the clay with his sheaf knife, leaned over from the bank of the little creek, and moistened it in the water. He dug another, moistened that, moulded the two together — and Marie-Louise smiled at him a little tremulously, as their eyes met.

The tears were very near to those brave dark eyes since three days ago. Jean mechanically added a third piece of clay to the other two. Much had happened in those three days — all Bernay-sur-Mer seemed changed since that afternoon when Gaston, so Marie-Louise had told him, seeing a boat adrift and fearing there might be some one in it, had tried during a lull in the storm to reach it with her assistance, and an oar had broken, and the tide on the ebb had driven them close to the Perigeau where they had swamped, and somehow Gaston had been flung upon the outer edges of the reef, and the boat, sodden, weighted, following, had crushed him against the rocks.

Jean looked at Marie-Louise again. She was all in black now — she and good Mother Fregeau had made the dress between them for the church that morning, when Father Anton had said the mass for Gaston.

But Marie-Louise was not looking at him — her elbows were on the ground, her chin was cupped in her hands, and the long black lashes veiled her eyes. She had not told him any more of the story — Jean could picture that for himself. How many times must she have risked her life to have pulled Gaston to the rocks higher up upon the reef! A daughter of France, Gaston had called her. *Bon Dieu*, but she was that, with her courage and her strength! One would not think the strength was there, but then the black dress did not cling like the wet clothes that other night to show the liteness of the rounded limbs.

His fingers began to work into the clay, unnaturally diffident and hesitant at first, not with the deft certainty of their custom, but as though groping tentatively for something that was curiously intangible, that eluded them. Marie-Louise, as she had been that night, was living before him again — the lines of her form so full of grace and so beautiful, so full of the virility of her young womanhood, the shapely head, the hair streaming in abandon about her shoulders — and it was like and yet not like that great bronze statue so often in his dreams, imaginary and yet so real, that was set in the midst of that great city in a great square. And then suddenly, strangely, of their own volition, it seemed, his fingers, where they had been hesitant before, began now to work with a sure swiftness.

His eyes were drinking in the contour of Marie-Louise's face in a rapt, eager, subconscious way. There was something deeper there than the mere prettiness of feature, something that was impressing itself in an absorbing, insistent way upon him. Her face made him think of the face of that statue — there was a hint of masculinity that brought with it no coarseness, nor robbed it of its sweetness or its charm, but like that

massive face of bronze that towered high, that people with uplifted heads stood and gazed upon, that none passed by without a pause, stamped it with calm fearlessness; and courage and resolve outshone all else and alone was dominant there.

Marie-Louise sat up suddenly from the ground and turned toward him, her brows gathered in a pretty, puzzled way.

“Why do you look at me like that, Jean?” she demanded abruptly. “And what are you doing there? It is not the doll you promised to make for little Ninon Lachance — it is much too big.” She leaned forward. “What are you making?”

“*Ma foi!*” Jean muttered, with a little start — and stared at the lump of clay. “I — I do not know.”

“Well, then,” said Marie-Louise gravely, “don’t do any more. I want to talk to you, Jean.”

“How, not do any more!” protested Jean whimsically. “Was it not you who said, ‘We will go to the creek this afternoon and make *poupées*’? And look” — he jerked his hand toward a large basket on the ground beside him — “to do that I shall perhaps not keep my promise to meet the *Lucille* when she comes in and bring a panier of fish to Jacques Fregeau at the Bas Rhône. And now you say, ‘Don’t do any more’!”

“Yes; I know,” admitted Marie-Louise. “But I want to talk to you. Listen, Jean. To-morrow Mother Fregeau must go back to the Bas Rhône. She has been too long away in her kindness now. You know how she came to me the next morning after Uncle Gaston died, and put her arms around me and has stayed ever since.”

Jean shifted the lump of clay a little away from Marie-Louise, but his fingers still worked on.

“She has a heart of gold,” asserted Jean. “Who should know any better than I, who have lived with her all these years?”

Marie-Louise’s eyes travelled slowly in a half tender, half pensive way over Jean. His coat was off; the loose shirt was open at the neck displaying the muscular shoulders, and the sleeves were rolled up over the brown, tanned arms; the powerful hands, powerful for all their long, slim, tapering fingers, worked on and on; the black hair clustered truantly, as it always did, over the broad, high forehead. She had known Jean all her life, as many years as she could remember, and her love for him was very deep. It had come to seem her life, that love; and each night in her prayers she had asked the *bon Dieu* to bless and take care of Jean, and to make her a good wife to him when that time should come. It was so great, that love, that sometimes it frightened her — somehow it was frightening her now, for there was a side to Jean that, well as she knew him, she felt intuitively she had never been able to understand.

She spoke abruptly again, a little absently.

“I do not know yet what I am to do. There is the house, and Father Anton says I must not live there alone.”

“But, no!” agreed Jean. “Of course not! That is what I say, too. It is all the more reason why we should not wait any longer, you and I, Marie-Louise.”

A tinge of colour crept shyly into Marie-Louise’s face, as she shook her head.

“No; we must wait, Jean. It is too soon after — after poor Uncle Gaston.”

“But it was Gaston’s wish, that,” persisted Jean gently. “Have I not told you what he said, *petite*?”

Again Marie-Louise shook her head.

“ But one is sad for all that,” she answered. “ And to go to the church, Jean, when one is sad, when one should go so happy! Oh, I want to be happy then, Jean. I do not want to think of anything that day but only you, Jean — and sing, and there must be sunshine and fête. But now, for a little while, it is Uncle Gaston. You do not think that wrong? ”

“ No,” said Jean slowly, “ it is not wrong, and I understand; but then, too, Gaston would understand, for it was his wish.”

Marie-Louise bent forward with a strange little impulsive movement.

“ That is twice you have said that, Jean,” she said. “ I — I almost wish Uncle Gaston had not said what he did to you that night. Jean, it — it is not what he said, nor what you said to him. That must not make any difference. Never, never, Jean! One does not marry for that — it is only if there is love.”

“ *Mais, 'cré nom!* ” exclaimed Jean, suddenly setting aside his clay and catching Marie-Louise’s face between his hands. “ Why do you talk like that? What queer fancies are in that little head? Now, tell me ” — he kissed her lips, while the blood rushed crimson to her cheeks — “ tell me, is that not answer enough? And have we not loved each other long before that night, and does not all Bernay-sur-Mer know that it will dance at the *noces*? ”

“ Yes,” whispered Marie-Louise, a little breathlessly.

“ Ah, then,” said Jean tenderly, “ you must not talk like that. What, Marie-Louise, if I should say to myself, ‘ now perhaps Marie-Louise has not loved me all these years, and — ’ ”

She drew hurriedly away.

“ Don’t, Jean! ” she said quickly. “ It hurts, that! I love you so much that sometimes I am afraid. And

to-day I am afraid. I do not know why. And sometimes it is so different. That night on the reef when I thought that soon the rocks would be covered and that there was no help for Uncle Gaston and myself, and that no one could come to us even if we were seen, I saw your lantern and the *bon Dieu* told me it was you and I had no more fear. I was so sure then — so sure then. Oh, Jean, you must be very good to me to-day. It — it was so hard — the dark eyes were swimming now with tears — “to say good-bye to Uncle Gaston. Perhaps it is that that is making me feel so strangely. But sometimes it seems as though it could never be, the great happiness for you and me, it is so great to think about that — that it frightens me. And I have wanted to talk to you about it, Jean, often and often. Does it make you very glad and happy, too, to think of just you and me together here, and our home, and the fishing, and — and years and years of it?”

“But, yes; of course!” smiled Jean; and, picking up the clay again, began to scrape at it with his knife.

“But are you sure, Jean?” — there was a little tremor in her voice. “I do not mean so much that you are sure you love me, but that you are sure you would always be happy to stay here in Bernay-sur-Mer. You are not like the other men.”

“How not like them?” Jean demanded, surveying in an absorbed sort of way the little clay figure that was taking on rough outline now. “How not like them?”

“Well — that!” — Marie-Louise pointed at the clay in his hands. “That, for one thing — that you are always playing with, that it seems you cannot put aside for an instant, even though I asked you to a moment ago. You are always making the *poupées*, and if not the *poupées* with mud and dirt, then you must

waste the inside of Mother Fregeau's loaves that she bakes herself, or steal the dough before it reaches the oven to keep your fingers busy making little faces and droll things out of it."

Jean looked up to stare at Marie-Louise a little perplexedly.

"*Mais, zut!*" he exclaimed. "And what of that! And if I amuse myself that way, what of that? It is nothing!"

"Nevertheless," Marie-Louise insisted, nodding her head earnestly, "it is true what I have said — that you are not like the other men in Bernay-sur-Mer. Do you think that I have not watched you, Jean? And have you not said little things to show that you grow tired of the fishing?"

"But that is true of everybody," Jean protested. "Does not Father Anton say that all the world is poor because there is none in it who is contented? And if I grumble sometimes, do not all the others do the same? Pierre Lachance will swear to you twice every hour that the fishing is a dog's life."

She shook her head.

"It is different," she said. "You are not Pierre Lachance, Jean, and I want you to be happy all your life — that is what I ask the *bon Dieu* for always in my prayers. And I do not know why these thoughts come, and I do not understand them, only I know that they are there."

"Then — *voilà!* We will drive them away, and they must never come back!" Jean burst out, half gaily, half gravely. "See, now, Marie-Louise" — he caught her hand in both of his, putting aside the lump of clay again — "it is true that sometimes I am like that, and I do not understand either; but one must take things as they are, is that not so?"

She nodded — a little doubtfully.

“Well, then,” cried Jean, “why should I not be happy here? Have I not you, and is that not most of all? And as for the rest, do I not do well with the fishing? Is there any who does better? Do they not speak of the luck of Jean Laparde? *’Cré nom!* Different from the others! Who is a fisherman if it is not I, who have been a fisherman all my life? And of what good is it to wish for anything else? What else, even if I wanted to, could I do? I do not know anything else but the boats and the nets. Is it not so, Marie-Louise?”

“Y-yes,” she said, and her eyes lifted to meet his.

“And happy!” he went on. “Ah, Marie-Louise, with those bright eyes of yours that belong all to me, who could be anything but happy? *Tiens!* You are to be my little wife, and Bernay-sur-Mer and the blue water is to be our home, and we will fish together, and you shall sing all day in the boat, and — well, what more is there to ask for?”

“Oh, Jean!” — she was smiling now.

“There, you see!” said Jean, and burst out laughing. “Marie-Louise is herself again, and — *pouf!* — the blue devils are blown away. And now wait until I have finished this, and I will show you something” — he picked up the clay once more. “Only you must not look until it is done.”

“Mustn’t I? Oh!” — with a little *moue* of resignation. “Well, then, hurry, Jean,” she commanded, and cupped her chin in her hands again, her elbows propped upon the ground.

It was playfully that Jean turned his back upon her, hiding his work, but as his fingers began again to draw and model the clay and his knife to chisel it, the smile went slowly from his face and his lips grew firmly

closed. It was strange that Marie-Louise should have known! It was true, the fishing grew irksome too often now; for those moods, like the mood in the storm, came very often, much more often than they had been wont to do. He had laughed at her, but that was only to pretend, to chase the sadness away and make her eyes shine again. It was true, too, as he had told her, that one must take things as they were. Whether he wanted to fish or not, he must fish — *voilà!* How else could one make the *sous* with which to live?

Oh, yes, he had laughed to make her laugh; but now, *pardieu!* it was bringing that mood upon himself. Where was that great city and that great square, and what was that great statue before which the people stood rapt and spellbound, and why should it come so often to his thoughts and be so real as though it were a very truth and not some queer imagination of his brain? There were wonderful things in the face of that bronze figure. He leaned a little forward toward the clay before him, his lips half parted now, his fingers seeming to tingle with a life, throbbing, palpitant, that was all their own, that was apart from him entirely, for they possessed a power of movement and a purpose that he had nothing to do with. He became absorbed in his work, lost in it. Time passed.

"Jean," Marie-Louise called out, "let me see it now."

"Wait!" he said almost harshly. "Wait! Wait! Wait!"

"*Jean!*" — it was a hurt little cry.

He did not hear her. There was something at the base of that statue of his dreams that always troubled him, that the people always pointed at as they gazed; but he had never been able to make out what it was there at the base of the statue. It was very strange

that he was never able to see that, when he could see the figure of the woman with the wonderful face so plainly!

He worked on and on. There were neither hours nor minutes — the afternoon deepened. There was no creek, no Marie-Louise, no Bernay-sur-Mer, nothing — only those dreams and the little clay figure in his hands.

And then Marie-Louise, her face a little white, timidly touched his arm.

“Jean!” she said hesitantly.

Her voice roused him. It seemed as though he was awakened from a sleep. He brushed the hair back from his eyes, and looked around.

“*Mon Dieu*,” he said, “but that was strange!” And then he smiled, still a little dazed, and lifted around the clay figure for her to see. “I do not know if it is finished,” he said, staring at it; “but perhaps I could do no better with it even if I worked longer.”

Marie-Louise’s eyes, puzzled, anxious, on Jean’s face, shifted to the little clay figure — and their expression changed instantly.

“But, Jean!” she cried, clasping her hands. “But, Jean, that is not a *poupée* you have made there. It — it will never do at all! Ninon Lachance would break the arms off at the first minute, and it is too *charmante* for that. Oh, but, Jean, it — it is *adorable*!”

Jean was inspecting the figure in a curiously abstracted way, as though he had never seen it before, turning his head now to this side, now to that, and turning the clay around and around in his hands to examine it from all angles, while a heightened colour crept into his face and dyed his cheeks. It was a small figure, hardly a foot and a half in height — the figure of a fisherwoman, barefooted, in short skirts,

the clothes as though windswept clinging close around her limbs, her arms stretched out as to the sea. He laughed a little unnaturally.

"Well, then, since it will not do for Ninon Lachance, and you like it, Marie-Louise," he said a little self-consciously; "it is for you."

"For me — Jean? Really for me?" she asked happily.

"And why not?" said Jean. "Since it *is* you."

"Me!" — she looked at him in a prettily bewildered way.

"But, yes," said Jean, holding the figure off at arm's length. "See, it is a beacon — the welcome of the fisherman home from the sea. And are you not that, Marie-Louise, and will you not stand on the shore at evening and hold out your arms for me as I pull home in the boat? Are you not the beacon, Marie-Louise — for me?"

Her hand stole over one of his and pressed it, but it was a moment before she spoke.

"I will pray to the *bon Dieu* to make me that, Jean — always," she said softly.

He drew her close to him.

"It is the luck of Jean Laparde!" he whispered tenderly.

They sat for a little time in silence — then Jean sprang sharply to his feet.

"*Ma foi*, Marie-Louise!" he called out in sudden consternation, glancing at the sun. "I did not know we had been here so long." He picked up the little clay figure hastily, placed it in the basket, threw his coat, that was on the ground, over it, and, swinging the basket to the crook of his arm, held out his hand to Marie-Louise. "Come, *petite*, we will hurry back."



JEAN WAS INSPECTING THE FIGURE,
TURNING THE CLAY AROUND AND AROUND IN HIS HANDS

It was not far across the fields and down the little rise to the road that paralleled the beach; and in some five minutes, walking quickly, they came out upon the road itself by the turn near the rough wooden bridge that crossed the creek halfway between the eastern headland and the white, clustering cottages of Bernay-sur-Mer. But here, for all their hurry, they paused suddenly of one accord, looking at each other questioningly, as voices reached them from the direction of the bridge which, still hidden from their view, was just around the bend of the road ahead.

“But, my dear”—it was a man speaking, his tone a sort of tolerant protest—“I am sure it is just the place we have been looking for. It is quiet here.”

“Quiet!”—it was a woman’s voice this time, in a wealth of irony. “It is stagnation! There isn’t a single thing alive here—even the sea is dead! It is enough to give one the blues for the rest of one’s life! And the accommodations at that unspeakable tavern are absolutely appalling. I can’t imagine what you are dreaming of to want to stay another minute! I’m quite sure there are lots of other places that will furnish all the rest and quiet required, and where, at the same time, we can at least be comfortable. Anyway, I’m not going to stay here!”

“But, Myrna, you —”

“There is some one coming,” said the girl.

Jean and Marie-Louise were walking forward again.

“What are they saying, Jean?” asked Marie-Louise.

Jean shook his head.

“I do not know,” he answered. “It is English. See! There they are!”

An elderly, well-dressed man, grey-haired, clean-shaven, a little stout, with a wholesomely good-natured, ruddy face, was leaning against the railing of the bridge; and beside him, digging at the planks with the tip of her parasol, stood a girl in dainty white, her head bent forward, her face hidden under the wide brim of a picture hat.

Jean's eyes, attracted as by a magnet, passed over the man and fixed upon the girl. At Nice, at Monte Carlo, so they said, one saw many such as she; but Bernay-sur-Mer was neither Nice nor Monte Carlo, and he had never seen a woman gowned like that before. '*Cré nom*, what exquisite harmony of line and poise! If she would but look up! *Bon Dieu*, but it would be a desecration of the picture if she were not gloriously pretty!

The gentleman, nodding pleasantly, greeted them as they approached.

"Good afternoon!" he said smilingly, in French.

The girl had raised her head, grey eyes sweeping Marie-Louise with well bred indifference — and Jean was staring at her.

"*Bon jour, m'sieu!*" — he spoke mechanically, lifted his cap mechanically.

His eyes had not left the girl's face. He could not take his eyes from her face. It was a wonderful face, a beautiful face, and something in it thrilled him and bade him feast his eyes upon it to drink in its beauty. And, his head thrown back exposing the bare rugged neck, the broad, sturdy shoulders unconsciously squared a little, the fine, dark eyes wide with admiration and a strange, keen appraisement, the splendid physique, the strength, the power and vigour of young manhood outstanding in face and form, he gazed at her. And her eyes, from Marie-Louise, met his, and

from them faded their expression of indifference, and into them came something Jean could not define, only that as the blood rushed suddenly unbidden to his face and he felt it hot upon his cheeks, he saw the colour ebb from hers to a queer whiteness — and then her hat hid her face again — and he had passed by.

It was as though his veins were running fire. He glanced at Marie-Louise. Shyly diffident in the presence of strangers, her head was lowered. She had seen nothing. Seen nothing! Seen what? He did not know. His blood was tingling, his brain was confusion.

He walked on, hurrying unconsciously.

It was Marie-Louise who spoke.

“They are of the *grand monde*,” she said in a sort of wondering excitement, when they were out of ear-shot.

“Yes,” said Jean absently.

“And English or American.”

“Yes,” said Jean.

“But the rich people do not come to Bernay-sur-Mer where there is no amusement for them,” she submitted with a puzzled air. “I wonder what they are going to do here?”

Jean’s eyes were on the road. He did not raise them.

“Who knows!” said Jean Laparde.

— IV —

STRANGERS WITHIN THE GATES

“**U**NTIL to-morrow”—the words kept echoing in Jean’s ears, as he hurried now on his way back to the Bas Rhône. “Until to-morrow”—Marie-Louise had called to him, as he had left the house on the bluff after taking her home. Well, what was there unusual in that! Though he went often, he did not go to see Marie-Louise every evening, and it was not the first time she had ever said it. Why should he be vaguely conscious of a sort of relief that she had said “until to-morrow” on this particular occasion? It was a very strange way to feel—but then his mind was in the most curiously jumbled state! That meeting at the bridge of less than half an hour ago obsessed him. Where had they come from, these strangers? How long were they going to stay? Or, perhaps—an unaccountable dismay suddenly seized him—perhaps they had already gone! But Papa Fregeau, of course, would know all that—therefore, naturally, he was impatient to reach the Bas Rhône and Papa Fregeau.

The empty basket on his arm, for Marie-Louise had taken the beacon and he had forgotten all about Papa Fregeau’s fish, Jean paused as he reached the bridge. It was here that look had passed between them. He would never forget that. It meant nothing—he was not a fool—it could mean nothing. It was only a look, only an instant in which those grey eyes had met his—but he would never forget it!

He hurried on again.

Perhaps he had imagined that expression, that flash, that spark, that something that was impellingly magnetic in those grey eyes. No, he had not imagined it; he had felt it, known it, sensed it. In that one instant something had passed between them that in all his life he would never forget — it had left him like a man adrift on a shoreless sea with the startling wonder of it. She was of the *grand monde* — Marie-Louise had said it. And he was a fisherman. She could have no interest in a fisherman; and what interest could a fisherman — bah, it was pitifully laughable! But it was not laughable! If he could only define that look! It was as if — *bon Dieu*, what was it! — as if she were a woman and he were a man. Yes; it was that! It was only for a moment, by now she would have forgotten it; but for that moment it had been that. Only, whereas she would have forgotten, with him it remained. It was curious — her form was even more like that dream statue than was Marie-Louise's. If by any chance she should already have gone! The thought, recurring, brought once more that twinge of dismay. Was it strange that he should want to see her again! True, she would never look at him like that a second time, she had been off her guard for that little instant when there had been no *grand monde* and no fisherman, but she was still the same beautiful woman, glorious in form and face — and the allure-ment of her presence was like some rare, exquisite fragrance stealing upon the senses, enslaving them.

And now, as he approached the little village, and passed the first cottage, with the Bas Rhône in sight beyond, he found himself eagerly searching the beach, the single street for sign of her. But there was no sign. Everything about the village was as it always

was every early evening in Bernay-sur-Mer, when it was summer and the light held late. Strewn out along the beach, the men were at work upon their boats and nets; the children played about the doorways; through the open doors one could see the women busy over the evening meal — nothing else! And surely there would have been some stir of excitement if the strangers were still there, at least amongst the children — it was an event, that, to Bernay-sur-Mer. They had gone then, evidently!

Jean's eyes lifted from a fruitless sweep of the beach to fix on the figure of Papa Fregeau emerging on the run from the Bas Rhône.

"The fish, Jean! The fish!" the fat little man called out breathlessly.

"The fish?" repeated Jean — and then, a little sheepishly, stared into the empty basket.

Papa Fregeau, who had reached Jean's side, was staring into it too.

"Yes — the fish! The fish!" he shouted. "Where are the fish you promised to bring back?"

And then Jean laughed.

"Why," said Jean, "I — I think I must have forgotten them."

Papa Fregeau was excited. He began to dance up and down, his fat paunch shaking like jelly.

"Idiot! Imbecile!" he stormed. "Have I not had trouble enough without this! *Sacré bleu de miséricorde!* What an afternoon! And you laugh — *bête*, that you are! And now what shall I do?"

"Do?" said Jean — and stopped laughing. "What is the matter?"

"Matter!" spluttered the patron of the Bas Rhône. "Matter! Have I not told you what is the matter? The fish!"

"Yes, but a few fish," said Jean, eyeing the other in a half puzzled way. "What are a few fish that you —"

"You do not understand!"—Papa Fregeau was still dancing up and down as he kept step with Jean, who had now started on again toward the Bas Rhône. "Listen! They are Americans of Paris, they say! They arrive in an automobile this afternoon — mademoiselle and her father, the maid and the chauffeur. It is fine, they stop at the Bas Rhône and engage rooms. Excellent! Nothing could be better. There is profit in that. I carry the trunks, the valises, a multitude of effects that are strapped all over the automobile to the rooms, and am on the point of sending for Mother Fregeau at Marie-Louise's. *Sapristi* — I do not pretend to be a cook! They start out for a walk, the mademoiselle and her father — and the mademoiselle, before they are out of sight from the window, returns to say that they will not stay, that I shall repack everything on that accursed car in readiness for their departure on the return from their walk. *Tourment de Satan!* — very good, I repack it. And now you bring no fish!"

Jean shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, since they are gone, what does it matter?"

"Gone! *Tonnerre!*"—Papa Fregeau's face was apoplectic, and his fat cheeks puffed in and out like toy balloons. "Gone! Have I not told you that they are not gone!"

"You have told me nothing"—there was a sudden, quick interest in Jean's voice. "They are gone — and they are not gone! What are you talking about?"

"I do not know what I am talking about!" snapped Papa Fregeau fiercely. "How should I know! It is first this, then that, then this, then that — it is a

badauderie! She is crazy, the girl; the father is no better; the maid, Nanette, is a hussy. She slapped my face when I but paid her a pretty compliment; and Jules, the chauffeur, is a pig who lies on his back under the infernal machine and will not lift a finger with the baggage. Wait! Listen! Come here!" He pulled Jean in through the door and across the café to the bar at the far end of the room, where he hastily decanted a glass of cognac and tossed it off. "See! Listen!" he went on excitedly, replenishing his glass. "I repack everything on the machine again, which is out there behind the tavern. I climb the stairs and I descend the stairs three dozen times, there is always one more package. And then fifteen minutes ago mademoiselle returns from her walk alone, and waves her hands — *pouf!* — just like that — and she says: 'Monsieur Fregeau, we will stay; take the baggage back to the rooms!' *C'est insupportable, ça!*" Papa Fregeau flung out his arms in abandoned despair. "And now there is no supper for them. *Sapristi*, I am no cook; but I could cook fish if you, *misérable* that you are, had brought them — heh! And it is too late now to send for Mother Fregeau."

Jean was paying but slender attention. They had not gone! They were going to stay!

"Get Madame Lachance, next door, to help you," he said absently. Then abruptly: "Mademoiselle returned alone, you say — and what of monsieur, her father?"

Papa Fregeau made a gulp at his second glass.

"He is impossible!" he choked. "With him it is the sunset! Who ever heard of such a thing! He is on the beach to gaze at the sunset! *Nom d'un nom*, is it extraordinary that the sun should set! But it is not him, it is mademoiselle. I am sure he knows noth-

ing of all this, and concerns himself less. It is made-moiselle's doing. And I have had enough! I will not any longer be made a fool of!" He banged his pudgy fist on the *comptoir*. "Is it to stand on my head that I am patron of the Bas Rhône! *Sacré bleu!* I will not support it! I tell you that I will not—" Papa Fregeau's mouth remained wide open.

"Monsieur Fregeau!" a voice called softly in excellent French from the rear door. "Nanette is struggling with a valise on the back stairs that is much too heavy for her, and perhaps if you —"

Papa Fregeau's mouth closed, opened again — and, in his haste to make a bow, the cognac glass became a shower of tinkling splinters on the floor.

"But *immédiatement!* Instantly, Mademoiselle!" cried Papa Fregeau effusively. "On the moment! A valise that is too heavy for her! It is a sacrilege! It is unpardonable! Instantly, Mademoiselle, on the instant! On the moment!" — and he rushed from the room.

She stood in the doorway; and, from under bewitchingly half closed lids, the grey eyes met Jean's. And under her gaze that was quite calm, unruffled, self-possessed now, the blood rushed tingling again through his veins, and again he felt it mounting to his cheeks. She wore no hat now; and, with the sun's last rays through the doorway falling softly upon her wealth of hair, it was as though it were a wondrously woven mass of glinting bronze that crowned her head.

Jean's cap was in his hand.

"Oh!" she said. "You are the" — there was just a trace of hesitation over the choice of the word — "the man who passed us on the bridge a little while ago, aren't you?"

There was something, a sort of indefinable challenge,

in the voice and eyes, a carelessness that, well as it was simulated, was not wholly genuine. Jean's eyes met the grey ones, held them — and suddenly he smiled, accepting the challenge.

"It is good of mademoiselle to recognise me," he answered.

She stared at him for an instant, her eyes opening wide; and then, with a contagious, impulsive laugh, she came forward into the room.

"Of course!" she cried. "You would answer like that! I knew it! You are less like a fisherman, for all your clothes, than any man I ever saw."

"I?" said Jean, in quick surprise. It was strange she had said that! It was only that afternoon that Marie-Louise had said almost the same thing. Not like a fisherman! Why not? What was this imagined difference between himself and the other men in Bernay-sur-Mer?

"Yes; you," she returned briskly. "And now I suppose you will tell me that you were born here, and have lived here all your life?"

"But yes, mademoiselle," he smiled again, and shrugged his shoulders; "since it is so. I have never been anywhere else."

"And since it is so, it must be so," she nodded. "What is your name?"

"Jean Laparde," he replied.

"Jean" — she repeated the word deliberately. "I like Jean," she decided, nodding her head again. "I like Laparde, too, but I will call you Jean."

Jean's eyes met hers a little quizzically. She carried things by assault, this beautiful American girl! There was a certain element of intimacy, an air of proprietorship adopted toward him that somehow, at one and the same time, quickened his pulse at the vague promise

that they would not be strangers if only she should stay in Bernay-sur-Mer, and piqued his man-mind at the hint of mastery being snatched from him.

"All call me Jean," he said quietly.

"Then that is settled!" she announced brightly. "Now tell me — Jean. Is there any other place in the village besides this impossible Taverne du Bas Rhône where we could stay for a week — a month — as long as we liked?"

"A week — a month!" — Jean leaned suddenly toward her, an incredulous delight unconsciously spontaneous in his voice. "You are going to stay that long? But Papa Fregeau said you had no sooner arrived than you decided to go again, and —"

"Your Papa Fregeau has a tongue that runs away with him," she interrupted quickly. "One may change one's mind, I suppose? This place will do for to-night; but afterwards — surely there is some other place where we could stay?"

Jean shook his head.

"There is only the Bas Rhône," he said slowly. "I — I am afraid —"

"And now, after all, you are going to be stupid!" she exclaimed reproachfully.

What was it? What did she mean? It was not the words — they were nothing. It was the tone, her eyes, an appeal in the exquisite grace of the lithe form bending toward him, the touch of the fingers laid lightly on his sleeve, that look again that levelled all barriers between them — until she was a woman and he was a man. His mind was in riot. He was a fool! And yet, fool or no, the thought would come. Why did she want to stay now? Papa Fregeau had said that almost on their arrival they had decided to go on. It was during her walk that she had changed her mind.

What had happened on that walk to make her change her mind? A walk in Bernay-sur-Mer was not full of incident! It was ridiculous, absurd, fantastical, but it was there, the thought, sweeping him with a surge of wild emotion — was it that meeting on the bridge? But why? How? He was a rough-garbed fisherman, and she —

She laughed delightedly.

“What a frown! How fierce you are! Is it then such a terrible affair to help me a little — Jean?”

“*Mon Dieu!*” cried Jean — and the words were on his lips with a rush. “But — *no!*”

“Oh!” she murmured, and drew back a little; and the colour, rising, glowed pink through her cheeks. “You *are* impulsive, aren’t you? Well, then, since you are to help me, what are we to do?”

Jean’s eyes were revelling in that pink flush. It was satisfying to the man-mind, that — even though she were of the *grand monde* then, a woman was a woman after all. It was a sort of turning of the tables, that added to the magnetism of her presence because it put him suddenly more at his ease. But to help her — that was another matter. Bernay-sur-Mer was — Bernay-sur-Mer! *Voilà tout!* Apart from the Bas Rhône there was no accommodation for strangers, for there was nothing stranger than strangers in Bernay-sur-Mer. Since then there was no other place for them to go, he could think of no other place. And yet, a week, a month — to think that she would spend that time in Bernay-sur-Mer! *Ciel!* Where were his brains?

“Well?” she prompted, with alluring imperiousness.

It was the force of habit. In trouble, in perplexity, in joy, in sorrow, for counsel, for advice there was

but one court of appeal in Bernay-sur-Mer — the good Father Anton. The rôle of Father Anton was not only spiritual — it was secular. Bernay-sur-Mer was a child and Father Anton was its parent — it had always been so.

“I will ask Father Anton,” said Jean.

“Father Anton? Who is Father Anton?” she demanded.

“He is the curé,” Jean answered. “I do not know of any place, but Father Anton will know if there is any, and —”

“Splendid!” she broke in excitedly. “Let us go and ask Father Anton at once. Come along” — she crossed the café to the front door. “Come along, Jean, and show me the way.”

Yes, certainly, she carried things by assault this American girl. She bubbled with life and vivacity. And he was to walk with her now to Father Anton’s — half an hour ago he would as soon have dreamed of possessing a fortune! It was incredible! It must be a marvellous world that, where she came from — but no, even the women of her world could not be like her! The suppleness of her form, it was divine; the carriage, the poise, the smile — it was intoxication, it went to the senses!

“I am mad! It is as though — as though I were drunk with wine!” Jean muttered — and followed her across the room.

“Now where is this Father Anton of yours?” — as Jean joined her outside the tavern.

“There,” said Jean, and pointed along the street. “Do you see the church — behind the second cottage? Well, it is there — just on the other side.”

She nodded — and Jean, glancing at her, found that she was not looking in that direction at all. Instead,

she seemed wholly engaged in watching a boat start shoreward, as it pulled away from the side of a smack anchored out in the bay. Father Anton might have been the last thing that concerned her. Jean's eyes, a little puzzled, followed hers. When he looked up again, the grey eyes were laughing at him.

"Is it quite safe out there?" she asked, waving her hand.

"Safe?" repeated Jean, in a bewildered way.

"Stupid!" she cried merrily. "Yes, of course — safe! If I am to stay here, I cannot lie all day upon the beach and do nothing. You have a boat, haven't you, Jean?"

"But, yes," said Jean.

"Then I am quite sure it will be safe," she decided. "I must have a boat, and, of course, a boatman. You will be the boatman, Jean. Oh, I really believe that, after all, Bernay-sur-Mer will be possible. There will be places where we can go, little excursions, and heaps of things like that. There, that is settled! And now I am more eager than ever to see Father Anton."

Yes; it was settled! It was phrase of hers, that! To have demurred would have been as impossible as to have said no. And, besides, he had no wish to either demur or refuse. It seemed as though he were hurried forward captive into some strange, unknown land of enchantment. It staggered him, bewildered him, lured him, fired his imagination — and there was no desire to rouse himself from what seemed like a wonderful dream. No woman that he had ever seen, or imagined was like her. To spend a day where he could feast his eyes upon her! — and did she not now talk of many days! Even a fisherman might lift his eyes as high as that — since she gave him leave. Afterwards, she would go away again; but, *bon Dieu*,

one could at least live in the present! It would be something to remember! Her eyes were on him again. He felt them studying him. Her hand brushed his arm. There was a faint, enticing fragrance of violets in the air about her.

"You are not very gallant, Jean!" she laughed out. "Aren't you pleased with the suggestion; or would you rather — fish?"

They had reached the church, and turned.

"I was thinking," said Jean, with unconscious naïveté, "that I was afraid Father Anton would not know of any place."

She looked at him quickly, a flash in the grey eyes — then the lids lowered. The next instant she was pointing ahead of her.

"But there!" she cried out. "There is Monsieur le Curé's house, is it not?" She clapped her hands in sudden delight. "Why, it is a play-house, only a make-believe one! And how pretty!"

Behind the church was a little garden, full-flowered; a little white fence; a little white gate; and, at the end of the garden, a little cottage, smaller than any, where none were large, in Bernay-sur-Mer, and which was white in colour, too, if one might hazard a guess for the vines that grew over it, covering it, submerging it, clothing it in a clinging mass of green, until only the little stubby chimney peeked shyly out from the centre of the slanting roof.

"Yes," said Jean; "and there is Father Anton himself."

A bare-headed, silver-haired form in rusty black *soutane*, a watering pot in hand, was bending over a bed of dahlias; but at the sound of their approach the priest put down the watering pot, and came hurriedly toward them to the gate.

“Ah, Jean, my son!” he cried out heartily — and bowed with old-fashioned courtliness to Jean’s companion. “I heard there were strangers in Bernay-sur-Mer, mademoiselle; but that they had gone on again. You are very welcome. Won’t you come in?”

She leaned upon the gate, smiling — and shook her head.

“No, thank you, Monsieur le Curé. I must not stay long, or my father will be wondering what could have become of me. The truth is, that I — we are in trouble, and Jean here has brought me to you.”

“Trouble!” exclaimed Father Anton anxiously, and his face grew suddenly grave.

She shook her head again, and laughed.

“Oh, it is not serious! You see — but I must introduce myself. I am Myrna Bliss. My father is Henry Bliss — I wonder if you have ever heard of him? We have lived for years and years in Paris.”

Father Anton was genuinely embarrassed.

“I — I am afraid I never have,” he admitted.

“Oh, well,” she cried gaily, “you mustn’t feel badly about it. His is entirely a reflected glory — that is what I tell him. Art! Everything is art with him, painting, sculpture, literature; and, as he can do neither one nor the other himself, he endows a school for this, or a *société* for that, and money exists for only one reason — the advancement of art. And since he calls Paris the home of art, we live in Paris. But now I am prattling like a school girl” — she laughed infectiously.

The curé’s old face wrinkled into smiles.

“It is very interesting, mademoiselle,” he said. “And here in Bernay-sur-Mer I fear we know too little of such things.” He reached across the fence and laid his hand affectionately on Jean’s shoulder. “But

it is not quite all our fault, is it, Jean? The *sous* come hard with the fishing, and we do not have much time for anything outside our own little world. I should greatly like to talk with monsieur, your father. Is it possible that you are to stay a little while here?"

"If we do"—the girl's face was a picture of roguish merriment—"you will not be able to escape him, I promise you, Monsieur le Curé—so beware! But that is our trouble. My father is on what he calls a little holiday—it is really that he needs rest and quiet. For a man of his age, what with his own affairs and his 'art,' he is far too active. Very well. Bernay-sur-Mer is ideal, only—except—Monsieur le Curé, I am sure, will understand—except the Bas Rhône."

"Ah, the Bas Rhône!" said Father Anton. "It is that, then—the Bas Rhône?"

"Exactly!" she smiled. "And so Jean has brought me to you to suggest something else for us."

Father Anton joined his finger tips thoughtfully.

"Yes; I see," he said. "My good friends, the Fregeaus, would do all in their power for you, they are most excellent people; but, yes—h'm—I see. It is a café much more than an inn, and for a café it answers very well; and, after all, it is not their fault that there are not proper accommodations for guests. Yes; I am afraid the accommodations must be very inadequate. But you see, mademoiselle"—Father Anton's voice had a quaint, gentle note of pleading—"we are quite off the main road, and it is rare that a stranger stops in Bernay-sur-Mer, and since they are poor they could not afford, even if they had the money, to make an investment that would bring no return. But something else—h'm! Truly, mademoiselle, I do not know—there is certainly no other place to board."

"Well, a little furnished cottage then," she suggested. "I have my own maid, and, if there were some one else to help a little, nothing would suit us better. Now, Monsieur le Curé, you are not going to be so heartless as to tell me there are no cottages either!"

For a moment Father Anton did not answer — then his face broke suddenly into smiles.

"But, no, mademoiselle," he declared quickly, nodding his head delightedly at Jean, "I shall tell you nothing of the sort. One might say it was almost providential. Nothing could be better! And the finest cottage in Bernay-sur-Mer, too! Mademoiselle and her father will be charmed with it — and all day I have been worrying about what to do with Marie-Louise. Would it not be just the thing, Jean?"

"*Ma foi!*" gasped Jean in surprise, staring from one to the other. "The house on the bluff?"

"And what else?" said Father Anton enthusiastically. "Listen, mademoiselle; I will explain to you. It is the house out there on the headland, where Gaston Bernier lived with his niece, Marie-Louise. Three days ago in the great storm *le pauvre* Gaston was hurt, and that night he died. Marie-Louise can no longer live there alone — it is not right for a young girl. I thought to bring her here to live with me and my old housekeeper; but now she can rent the house to you, and can help with the work for she is a very good cook."

"Father Anton, you are a treasure!" cried Myrna Bliss vivaciously. "We will take the house. And the rent? Would, say, two hundred francs a month be right?"

"Two hundred francs?" repeated Father Anton incredulously, his eyes widening.

“Yes; and another hundred for Marie-Louise.”

Three hundred francs! It was not a large sum of money — it was a fortune! Father Anton, in his years of ministry at Bernay-sur-Mer, could not remember ever having seen a sum like that all at one time; also, it was out of all proportion to what he would have thought Marie-Louise should demand. The good curé's face was a picture with its mingled emotions — he was torn between a desire that this good fortune should come to Marie-Louise, and a fear in his honest heart that he should be privy to the crime of extortion!

Myrna Bliss laughed at him merrily.

“Then that is settled!” she announced. “Three hundred francs. There is nothing more to be said. The only question is, will Marie-Louise let us have the house?”

“Mademoiselle,” said the old priest, his eyes twinkling, “may I say it? — you are charming! As for the arrangements, have no fear. I would go this evening, only I have some sick to visit. But very early in the morning I will see Marie-Louise, and by the time mademoiselle and her father have had breakfast the house will be at their disposal.”

She reached her hand across the gate to thank Father Anton and bid the curé good evening — but Jean no longer heard a word. His mind seemed to be clashing discordantly; his thoughts in dissension, in open hostility one to another. She was to live in the house on the bluff. Marie-Louise was to stay there, too. One moment he saw no objection to the plan; the next moment, for a thousand vague, fragmentary reasons, that in their entire thousand would not form a single concrete whole that he could grasp, he did not like it at all.

He answered Father Anton's “*au revoir*” mechan-

ically, as they started back for the Bas Rhône. She was in a hurry now, all life, all excitement — half running.

“Did I not tell you, Jean, that I would find just what I wanted?” she called out in gay spirits.

She had told him nothing of the sort.

“Yes,” said Jean.

They reached the Bas Rhône, and there, in the doorway, she turned.

“I must find my father, and tell him,” she said. There was a smile, a flash of the grey eyes, a glint from the bronze-crowned head, a quick little impetuous pressure on his arm, a laugh soft and musical as the rippling of a brook; and then: “Until to-morrow, Jean.”

And she was gone.

Until to-morrow! The words were strangely familiar. Papa Fregeau was hurrying through the café. Jean turned away. He had no wish to talk to Papa Fregeau — or any one else. He walked down to the beach — and his eyes, across the bay, fixed on the headland. Yes, that was it! Until to-morrow — that was what Marie-Louise had said — until to-morrow.

He went on along the beach, his brain feverishly chaotic. She had been like a vision, a glorious vision, suddenly gone, as she had stood there in the doorway. Her name was Myrna Bliss. Why not, since Father Anton could not go that night, why not go to Marie-Louise himself and tell her about the house? Yes; he would do that.

He crossed the beach to the road again, and started on — walking rapidly. As he neared the little bridge, his pace slowed. At the bridge he halted. Perhaps it would be better not to go — it would be better left to Father Anton, that!

"*Sacré bleu!*" cried Jean suddenly aloud. "What is the matter with me? What has happened?"

But he went no further along the road; for, after a moment, he turned, retracing his steps slowly toward Bernay-sur-Mer.

And so that night Jean did not go to Marie-Louise. But there, at the house on the bluff, later on, Marie-Louise, after Mother Fregeau had gone to bed, took the beacon that Jean had made and placed it upon the table in the front room where, before, that other beacon, the great lamp, had stood. And for a long time she sat before it, her elbows on the table, now looking at the little clay figure, now staring through the window to the headland's point where sometimes she could see the surf splash silver white in the moonlight. It had been a happy afternoon in many ways; but there was something that would not let it be all happiness, for there was confusion in her thoughts. The house was lonely now, and Uncle Gaston had gone; it did not seem true, it did not seem that it could be he would not open that door again and come thumping in with the nets over his shoulders and the wooden floats bumping on the floor — and the tears unbidden filled her eyes. And her talk with Jean somehow had not satisfied her, had not dispelled that intuition that troubled her, for all that he had laughed at her for it; and they had not, after all, settled what she was to do now that Uncle Gaston was gone, for, instead of talking more about it, Jean had forgotten all about her for ever so long while he had worked at the little clay figure.

Her eyes, from the window, fastened on the beacon with its open, outstretched arms — and, suddenly, confusion went and great tenderness came. He had made it for her, and he had said that — that it *was* her.

"Jean's beacon," she said softly.

And presently she went upstairs to the little attic room, and undressed, and blew out the candle; and, in her white night-robe, the black hair streaming over her shoulders, the moonlight upon her, she knelt beside the bed.

“ Make me that, *mon Père*,” she whispered; “ make me that — Jean’s beacon all through my life.”

“WHO IS JEAN LAPARDE?”

THE mattress was of straw — and the straw had probably been garnered in a previous generation, if not in a prehistoric age! It was so old that it was a shifting, lumpy mass of brittle chaff, whose individual units at unexpected moments punctured the ticking and, nettle-wise, stuck through the coarse sheet. It was not comfortable. It had not been comfortable all night. Truly, the best that could be said for the Bas Rhône was that, as Father Anton in his gentle way had taken pains to make it clear, its proprietors were well-intentioned — and that was a source of comfort only as far as it went!

Myrna Bliss wriggled drowsily into another position — and a moment later wriggled back into the old one. Then she opened her eyes, and stared about her. The morning sun was streaming in through the window. She observed this with sleepy amazement. After all then, she must have slept more than she had imagined, in spite of the awful bed.

The *lap-lap-lap* of the sea came to her. In through the open window floated the voices of children at play in the street; from down on the beach the sound of men's voices, shouting and calling cheerily to each other, reached her; from below stairs some sort of a family reunion appeared to be in progress. She could hear that absurd Papa Fregeau talking as though he were a soda-water bottle with the cork suddenly exploded!

“ Ah, *mignonne — chérie!* You are back! You will go away no more — not for a day! I have been in despair! It is the Americans! I have been miserable! *Tiens, embrasse-moi*, my little Lucille! ”

There was the commotion of a playful struggle, then the resounding smack of a kiss — and then a woman's voice.

“ Such a simpleton as you are, *mon Jacques!* ” — it was as though one were talking to a child. “ So they have put you in despair, these Americans! Well, then, I am back. And listen! ” — importantly. “ What do you think? ”

“ Think? ” cried Papa Fregeau excitedly. “ But I do not think! ”

“ That is true,” was the response; “ so I will tell you. They are going away this morning.”

“ *Merci!* ” exclaimed Papa Fregeau fervently. “ I am very glad! ”

“ They are going to Marie-Louise's.”

“ To Marie-Louise's! ” — incredulously. “ You tell me that they are going to Marie-Louise's? ”

“ Yes; to Marie-Louise's, stupid! Father Anton came an hour ago to make the arrangements. They are to rent the house, and Marie-Louise is to remain there *en domestique*. Now what have you to say to that? ”

“ *Mon Dieu!* ” ejaculated Papa Fregeau, with intense earnestness. “ That I am sorry for Marie-Louise! ”

Myrna Bliss laughed softly, delightedly to herself — and then, with a sudden little gasp, sat bolt upright in bed. The whole thing, everything since yesterday afternoon had been inconceivably preposterous — and she herself preposterous most of all! If her father ever heard the truth of it, what a scene there would be!

She got out of bed impulsively, walked to the window, and leaned her elbows on the sill, her brows gathered in a perplexed little frown. Just what *had* happened anyway? She had decided ten minutes after they had arrived in Bernay-sur-Mer that she would die of ennui if she stayed there. They had started for a walk, she and her father, and, without saying anything to him, she had turned back and taken it upon herself to inform this fat, effervescent little hotel proprietor that they would go on that afternoon. She had intended, during the walk, to tell her father what she had done, and, in fact, had told him; and then on her return after that — yes, that meeting on the bridge — she had countermanded her orders, and not only countermanded them but had even rented a cottage! Her father had seen nothing extraordinary in it, which was natural enough — since he left all travelling arrangements to her. Indeed, on the contrary, as Bernay-sur-Mer had seemed to appeal to him, he had been rather taken with the idea — if perhaps a trifle sceptical as to the success of the housekeeping plan. In a word, if the discovery of what she believed to be suitable accommodations had induced her to change her mind and stay in Bernay-sur-Mer, it was perfectly satisfactory to him. The brows smoothed out. As far as her father was concerned, that was all there was to it. She had been the practical manager ever since her mother had died five years before.

The brows puckered up again. Her father would never give it a second thought, he would never for an instant imagine there was any ulterior motive for what she had done. How could he — when the real reason was so utterly absurd, ridiculous and unheard of! Fancy! What would that select and ultra-exclusive set in Paris say? What if it ever came to the ears of

New York! Myrna Bliss to bury herself alive in a little Mediterranean village that was probably not even on the map, and all at a glance from the eyes of a — fisherman! They wouldn't believe it. Who would believe it! It was unimaginable!

Dainty little fingers reached up and drummed with their pink tips on the window pane; the pucker became more pronounced. Well, she *had* done it, nevertheless. And why was it so absurd, so ridiculous, so impossible after all? She would do exactly the same thing over again without an instant's hesitation. It was quite true the man was a fisherman — but he did not *look* like a fisherman. He was magnificent! It was not ridiculous at all — it was piquantly delightful. Neither was it so absurdly impossible — if she did not stay in Bernay-sur-Mer, it would only be to choose some other place equally as tiresome — and without even a "fisherman" to compensate for it. What a face the man had! It was not merely handsome, it was — well, it was the prototype of what the artist coterie that buzzed around her father day and night was forever attempting to give expression to, but which, until now, she had never believed could exist in real life. He would be a refreshing change this astounding man-creature, this Jean Laparde, after the vapid attentions of the vapid men who made up her life in the social whirl of Paris — Count von Heirlich and Lord Barnvegh, for examples, out of a host of satellites who were constantly at her heels, because, of course, she was an heiress; and whose attentions she endured because, of course, some day she must marry, and because, of course again, to marry anything less than a title, a name, fame, was quite out of the question. As for that, no one expected anything but a brilliant match for her — and certainly she expected nothing less for

herself. What a pity that they were not like Jean Laparde, those men of her world!

The fingers, from the window pane, tossed back a truant coil of hair; the white shoulders lifted in a little shrug. Paris — New York! That was all the world she knew. New York once a year — Paris the rest of the time. Expatriates — for art! That's what they were! Art — her father was obsessed with it. It was a mania with him; it was the last thing in the world that interested her. As a matter of fact, she couldn't seem to think of anything that particularly interested her. One tired quickly enough of the social merry-go-round — after a season it became inane. One surely had the right to amuse one's self with a new sensation — if one could find it! The man had the physique of a young god. A fisherman — well, what of it? He was splendid. He was more than splendid. Even the crude dress seemed to enhance him. It was a face that had made her catch her breath in that long second when their eyes had met. Yes, of course — why not admit it? — he interested her. He was rugged, he was strong, and above all he was supremely a man. Of course, it was only a matter of a week, a month, the time they chose to stay there; but it would be a decided novelty while it lasted.

She laughed suddenly aloud — a low, rippling little laugh. Actually the man was already her slave! Imagine a man like that her slave! Certainly it would be a new sensation. What a strange thrill it had given her when she had first caught sight of him on the bridge the afternoon before. Well, why shouldn't it have done so — a fisherman with a face like that? It was amazing! Think of finding such a man in such a situation! Was it any wonder that she had thrilled — even if he were only a fisherman? In Paris, of course,

she could not have done what she had done, it would have been quite out of the question, there were the conventions — but then in Paris one didn't see men like that!

“And since,” confided Myrna Bliss to a little urchin running in the street below, who neither saw nor heard her, “we are not in Paris, but in Bernay-sur-Mer, which is quite another story, you see it is not absurd or ridiculous at all, and I and my fisherman —”

She turned abruptly from the window at the sound of a knock and the opening of her door. It was Nanette, her maid, with a tray.

“I have mademoiselle's *déjeuner*,” announced Nanette. “Monsieur Bliss has already finished his, and asks if mademoiselle will soon be ready. He is waiting with Monsieur le Curé for you.”

“Waiting — with Monsieur le Curé?” — Myrna's eyebrows went up in well-simulated surprise.

“To visit the cottage mademoiselle has taken,” amplified Nanette, and her retroussé nose was delicately elevated a trifle higher. Nanette, very evidently, was one at all events who was not in favour of the plan.

“Oh, the cottage — of course!” exclaimed Myrna, as though suddenly inspired. “I had forgotten all about it. Dress me quickly then, Nanette.”

Nanette tossed a shapely dark head.

“Is mademoiselle going to stay here long?” — Nanette at times felt privileged to take liberties.

“Gracious, Nanette!” complained Myrna sweetly. “What a question! How can you possibly expect me to know?”

Nanette arranged the tray perfunctorily.

“There was a man who left a message with that imbecile proprietor for mademoiselle early this morning,”

she observed. “Mademoiselle has engaged a boatman?”

“A boatman? Certainly not!” declared Myrna Bliss. “Not without seeing the boat — and I have seen no boat!”

“But mademoiselle engages a cottage without seeing the cottage,” murmured Nanette slyly.

“That will do, Nanette!” said Myrna severely. “There was but one cottage; there are dozens of boats. It is quite a different matter. What did the man say?”

“That he was obliged to go out for the four o’clock fishing this morning,” said Nanette, pouting a little at the rebuke; “but that he would go to mademoiselle at the cottage early in the forenoon.”

A row of little white teeth crunched into a piece of crisp toast.

“Very well, Nanette.” Myrna’s brows pursed up thoughtfully. “You may get out that new marquissette from Fallard’s; and, I think” — she glanced out of the window — “my sunbonnet. And, Nanette” — suddenly impatient — “hurry, please — since father is waiting.”

Myrna’s impatience bore fruit. In ten minutes she was ready, and, running down the stairs, went out to the street, where her father and the curé, deep in conversation — on art undoubtedly, since her father was doing most of the talking! — were pacing slowly up and down, as they waited for her.

Her sunbonnet was swinging in her hand, the big grey eyes were shining, the glow of superb health was in her cheeks.

“Good morning, Father Anton!” she called out gaily. “What a shame to have kept you waiting!”

The old priest turned toward her with unaffected pleasure, as he held out his hand.

“Good morning to you, mademoiselle”—he was smiling with eyes as well as lips. “What a radiant little girl! It makes one full of life and young again; you are, let me see, you are—a tonic!”

She laughed as she turned to her father.

“’Morning, Dad! Sleep well?”

Henry Bliss removed his cigar to survey his daughter with whimsical reproach; then he patted her cheek affectionately.

“Fierce, wasn’t it?” he chuckled. “Those beds are the worst ever! I was telling the curé here about them.”

“It is too bad,” said Father Anton solicitously. “It is regrettable. I am so very sorry. But”—earnestly—“you must not think too hardly of the Fregeaus. Since no guests sleep here, I am sure they can have no idea that—”

“No; of course not!” agreed Henry Bliss heartily, and laughed. “The hard feelings are all in the beds—and we’ll let them stay there. Now, then, Myrna, are you ready to inspect this new domain of yours? And shall we walk, or take the car? Father Anton says it is not far.”

“We will walk then,” decided Myrna.

It was the walk she had taken yesterday, at least it was the same as far as the little bridge; and for that distance she walked beside her father and the curé, chatting merrily, but there she loitered a little behind them. Half impishly, half with a genuine impulse that she rather welcomed than avoided, she told herself that it was quite unfair to pass the little spot so indifferently. Was it not here that this most bizarre of adventures had begun? She had stood here by the railing, and he had stood there across on the other side, and—the red leaped suddenly flaming into her cheeks. She had

never looked at a man like that before — no man had ever looked at her like that before! And it had been spontaneous, instant, like a flash of fire that had lighted up a dark and unknown pathway, which, in the momentary blaze of light, was full of strange wonder; and which, because it was an unknown way, and because the glimpse had shown so much in so brief an instant that the brain fused all into confusion and nothing was concrete, resulted, not in illuminating the way, but, the flash of light gone again, in transforming the pathway only into a bewildering maze.

She laughed a little after a while, shaking her head. Such an absurd fancy! But what an entrancing, alluring little fancy! Decidedly, it would be a new sensation to be lost in a maze like that — for a time. She would tire of it soon enough — the thrill probably would not even last as long as she would want it to. No thrill ever did! She bit her lip suddenly in pretty vexation. It was stupid of the man to go off fishing! Had he done it to pique her? The idea! He certainly could not have the temerity to imagine that it lay within his power to pique her. The sunbonnet swung to and fro abstractedly from its ribbon strings. Wasn't it strange that he had — piqued her!

She went on after her father and the curé. They were quite a way ahead now, and she hastened to catch up with them. As she drew near, she caught her father's words.

“. . . Peyre on the *Histoire Générale des Beaux-Arts*, Monsieur le Curé, I recommend it to you heartily. It is a most comprehensive little volume, embracing in a condensed form the story of the arts from the time of the Egyptians down to the present day, and —”

Myrna, in spite of herself, laughed outright, at which both men turned their heads. Her father, incorrigible,

was at it again; and, once started, there was no stopping him. Poor Father Anton! For the rest of the way he would listen to art!

“Did I not tell you to beware, Father Anton?” she cried out in comical despair — and waved them to go on again.

She had no desire to listen to art, its relation to nature, its relation to science, its relation to civilisation, nor, above all, to a dissertation on the modern school. She had heard it all before; and, if it had not passed as quickly through one ear as it had come into the other, her head, she was quite sure, would have driven her to distraction. Besides, it was much more important to think about something else — no, not what she had been thinking about a moment ago; but, for instance, to be practical, about this menage whose wheels, without knowing whether they were oiled or not, she had impulsively set in motion. Would the cottage be at all habitable? Would this Marie-Louise be at all suitable? Would Marie-Louise and Nanette get along together? Nanette was insanely jealous of Jules — nothing but the fact that Jules was with them would have induced Nanette, to whom Paris was the beginning and the end of all things, to have come on such a trip. Yes, there was a very great deal to think about — now that it occurred to her! Myrna fell into a brown study, quite oblivious to her surroundings.

When she joined her father and the curé again, they had stopped at the edge of the little wood on the headland, and a cottage, almost as prettily vine-covered as Father Anton’s, lay before them.

“Well, Myrna,” her father called, with a smile, “I must say your plunge in the dark looks propitious so far.”

“No, no! Not a plunge in the dark!” protested

Father Anton quickly, his eyes full of expectant pleasure on Myrna. “That is not fair, Monsieur Bliss! It was on my recommendation, was it not, mademoiselle? And now — eh? — what does mademoiselle think of it?”

It was like the imaginative conception of some painter. The cottage, green with climbing vines, spotlessly white where the vines were sparse, nestled in the trees — in front, as far as the eye could reach, the glorious, deep, unfathomable blue of the Mediterranean; nearer, the splash of surf, like myriad fountains, on the headland’s rugged point; while a tiny fringe of beach, just peeping from under the edge of the cliff at the far side of the cottage, glistened as though full of diamonds in the sunlight.

“Father Anton — you are a dear!” Myrna cried impetuously.

Her eyes roved delightedly here and there. There was a little trellis with flowers over the back door — that little outhouse would do splendidly as a garage. And then the front door opened, and her eyes fixed on a girl’s figure on the threshold — and somehow the figure was familiar.

“Who is that, Father Anton?” she demanded.

“But it is Marie-Louise — who else?” smiled the priest. “I will call her.”

“No,” said Myrna; “we will go in.”

Of course! How absurd! She recognised the girl now. It was the girl who had passed them on the bridge — Myrna’s sunbonnet swung a little abstractedly again — with Jean Laparde.

Father Anton bustled forward.

“Marie-Louise,” he said, as they reached the door, “this is the lady and gentleman who are to take the house, and —”

“ Oh, but I think we have seen each other before,” interposed Myrna graciously. “ Was it not you, Marie-Louise, who passed us on the bridge yesterday afternoon? ”

Marie-Louise’s dark eyes, deep, fearless, met the grey ones — and dropped modestly.

“ Yes, mademoiselle,” she said.

“ Certainly! ” said Henry Bliss pleasantly. “ I remember you too, and — ah! ” With a sudden step, quite forgetting the amenities due his daughter, he brushed by her into the room, and stooped over the clay figure of the beacon. He picked it up, looked at it in a sort of startled incredulity, as though he could not believe his eyes; then, setting it down, went to the window, threw up the shade for better light, and returned to the clay figure. And then, after a moment, he began to mutter excitedly. “ Yes — undoubtedly — of the flower of the French school — Demaurais, Lestranger, Pitôt — eh? — which? And — yes — here — within a day or so — it is quite fresh! ” He rushed back to the doorway to Father Anton. “ Who has been in the village recently? ” — his words were coming with a rush, he had the priest by the shoulders and was unconsciously shaking him. “ Was it a man with long black hair over his coat collar and a beak nose? Was it a little short man who always jerks his head as he talks? Or was it a big fellow, very fat, and, yes, if it were Pitôt he would probably be drunk? Quick! Which one was it? ”

Father Anton, jaw dropped, dumb with amazement, could only shake his head. This American! Had he gone suddenly mad?

“ Good heavens, dad, what is the matter? ” Myrna cried out.

He paid no attention to her.

“You, then!” — he whirled on Marie-Louise, grasping her arm fiercely. “Who has been here?”

“But — but, m’sieu,” stammered Marie-Louise, shrinking back in affright, “no one has been here.”

Myrna pressed forward into the room.

“Dad, what *is* the —” She got no further.

“It is true — I am a fool. I was wrong. Look, Myrna!” — his face flushed, his eyes lighted with the fire of an enthusiast, he was at the table, lifting up the little clay figure of the fisherwoman with the outstretched arms, the beacon, in his hands again. “Look, Myrna! No, I am not mad — I am only a fool. I, who pride myself as a critic, was fool enough for a moment to think this the work of perhaps Demaurais, or Lestrangle, or Pitôt — when no one of the three even in his greatest moment of inspiration could approach it! There is life in it. You feel the very soul. It is sublime! But it is more than that — it is a stupendous thing, for, since it has been freshly done, and no stranger to these people has been here, the man who did it must be one of themselves. Don’t you understand, Myrna, don’t you understand? The world will ring with it. It is the discovery of a genius. I make the statement without reservation. *This is the work of the greatest sculptor France will have ever known!*”

Father Anton had come forward a little timorously, lacing and unlacing his fingers. Upon Myrna’s face was a sort of bewildered stupefaction. Marie-Louise, her breath coming in little gasps, was gazing wide-eyed at the man who held in his hands her beacon, the clay figure she had seen Jean make.

“Is — is it true — what you say?” she whispered.

Henry Bliss looked at her for a moment, startled —

as though he was for the first time aware of her presence.

“ You — yes, of course, you must know about this, as it is in the house here,” he burst out abruptly. “ You know who made it? ”

“ But, yes,” said Marie-Louise, and now there was a sudden new note, a trembling note of pride that struggled for expression in her voice. “ But, yes — it was Jean Laparde.”

“ Laparde — Jean Laparde? ” — his voice was hoarse in its eagerness. “ Quick! ” he cried. “ Laparde — Jean Laparde? Who is Jean Laparde? ”

A flush crept pink into Marie-Louise's face.

“ He is my fiancé,” she said.

— VI —

THE GIFT

FATHER ANTON, with a smile, his eyes twinkling, looked from one to the other of the group as much as to say: "There! Is that not an altogether charming denouement?" Myrna had yet to discover herself in a situation to whose command she did not rise — inwardly a sudden confusion upon her, her face expressed a polite interest. As for Henry Bliss, the words were without any significance whatever — it was not what he wanted to know.

It was Marie-Louise, embarrassed, who broke the silence.

"Will mademoiselle and monsieur look through the house now, and tell me what rooms they will occupy?"

Henry Bliss, for answer, caught Father Anton again by the shoulder.

"This Jean Laparde," he flung out excitedly, "you ought to know all about him! He must have done other things besides this" — he swept his hand toward the beacon, which he had now very carefully replaced on the table.

"But, of course!" declared Father Anton, still smiling. "Mother Fregeau will assure you — forever little faces and figures out of her dough and the inside of her loaves."

"No, no — good Lord!" exclaimed Henry Bliss. "I mean —"

"I am telling you," interrupted Father Anton mildly.

"He has been forever at that since he was a boy, and then there are the clay dolls for the children, of which there would be very many, at least a hundred."

"A hundred! A hundred clay *dolls* by the man who did this!" shouted Henry Bliss eagerly. "And do you mean to say you never realised — oh, good Lord! Where are they?"

Father Anton's eyebrows went up in almost pitying astonishment.

"But, monsieur," he said patiently, "where would they be? They do not last long; and, even if the children did not break them almost immediately, they would soon crumble to pieces like their own mud pies."

"Mud!" Henry Bliss bent quickly over the beacon again. "Yes, so it is! It is mostly mud. It is unbelievable! The man did not even have modelling clay to work with!" He swung again on the curé. "Well, where is this Jean Laparde? I want to see him at once!"

Myrna's laugh rippled suddenly through the room.

"Dad — don't get so excited. Your Jean Laparde won't run away. He's out fishing now, but he said he would come out here this morning."

"Out fishing — come out here this morning?" repeated her father, staring at her. "How do you know?"

Myrna shook her finger at him in playful severity.

"If you had paid any more than the merest pretence of attention to me last night, you would have remembered the name — no" — she laughed again — "no, perhaps after all I didn't mention it, I'm not sure I hadn't forgotten it myself; but he is the fisherman who took me to Father Anton here, you know — the one I told you might possibly do as a boatman for us while we were here."

"Great grief! Do as a — *boatman!*" ejaculated Henry Bliss weakly. "You, Monsieur le Curé, what time do these fishermen return?"

"But anytime, now," Father Anton answered. "The boats go out very early in the morning."

"Good!" Henry Bliss pushed the curé impetuously toward the door. "Then, you and I, Father Anton, will go right back to the village and be there when he comes in."

"But" — Father Anton was quite bewildered — one was literally carried off one's feet — were they all alike, these Americans! "But," he protested helplessly, as he was being pulled through the door, "but if the boats are already in, and since mademoiselle said he was coming here, then —"

"Then we will meet him on the road" — they were already out of the house. "Now, then, Monsieur le Curé, if you are a loyal Frenchman, step out quickly, for this is the greatest day in the history of France, the greatest day, I tell you, in the" — the voice died away in the distance.

Marie-Louise had not moved. She was still standing in the centre of the room, a strangely spellbound, dumfounded little figure.

"Mademoiselle," she ventured timidly, "what — what is —"

"I am sure I do not know," said Myrna languidly. "Have you no shoes or stockings?"

Marie-Louise glanced perplexedly at her small, bare feet.

"But, yes, mademoiselle — for the village sometimes, and when one walks in the fields."

"Go and put them on, then," directed Myrna. "And remember always to wear them while we are

here. When you come back, I will go through the house with you and tell you what to do."

"Yes, mademoiselle," said Marie-Louise nervously — there was a sense of guilt upon her, but wherein lay the enormity of her offence she did not understand. Nevertheless, was not mademoiselle of the great world, and since mademoiselle was displeased, surely mademoiselle must know. She turned hastily from the room.

"No — wait!" Myrna's brain, for all her outward composure, was far from calm. It seemed as though the little stone she had started rolling down the hill in a — well, was it a whim? — was gathering many other stones in its course and developing into an avalanche. She had no desire to go into the details of the house with this Marie-Louise at that moment; on the contrary, it was absolutely impossible. The one thing she wanted was to be alone — to clear all this muddle out of her head. "No — wait!" she repeated. "There will be quite time enough to attend to that when Nanette and Jules arrive; and in the meantime you had better go down to the Bas Rhône and help Nanette if you can. When they are ready, come back with them."

"Nanette, mademoiselle? But I do not know who Nanette is."

"My maid," said Myrna tersely.

"Yes, mademoiselle" — Marie-Louise, with a quick nod, was running from the room. "At once, mademoiselle — as soon as I have put on my shoes and stockings."

Myrna tossed her sunbonnet on a chair, and walked over to the table to inspect the little clay figure. For ten minutes she stood in front of it, now frowning, now with unconscious admiration the dominant expression

upon her face, now with puzzled bewilderment in her eyes. Of the technique of any art she not only knew nothing, but secretly held it in contempt; but she could not have been her father's daughter to have lacked a sense of appreciation for the beautiful. At the end of the ten minutes she picked up her sunbonnet again, and walked slowly out of the house.

At the headland's point, two hundred yards away, she sat down upon the rocks. She could not seem to get that little clay figure out of her head now. It was amazing how it took form before her eyes as realistically as though it were still in front of her! What a wonderful charm and appeal there was in it! She could see that for herself, even if her father had not grown so excited over it. "The greatest sculptor in France"—well, perhaps that was a little exaggerated! But her father was nevertheless acknowledged to be a critic second to none in the world of art, and he was far too chary of his reputation to sacrifice it on a myth. Certainly then, there was at least a promise in the man's work. What did her father mean to do? He had not rushed off that way for nothing. It *was* really charming, that little figure. She would get Jean to let her have it, buy it from him. Imagine possessing the first piece of his work, if the man ever amounted to anything!

She threw a stone out into the water, watched it splash, watched the spray of the breaking waves on what seemed like a reef away out to one side of the headland, and watched a boat coming shoreward from out beyond the reef again. There was a disturbed little gathering of her brows. But suppose she did buy it, the thing would crumble to pieces in a few days, and—stupid! Of course! Had she not been often in those dirty *ateliers* that were always in a mess with their

clay and their plaster? One could send it to Marseilles to have a cast made; and, afterwards, the cast could be sent home to Paris.

What was her father going to do with this "discovery" of his, as he called it? Discovery — *his!* A little thrill ran through her. It was not his discovery — it was *hers!* It was she who had discovered Jean Laparde — in that one look. The man's soul, a great smouldering volcano of emotion, was in his face, his eyes. It was amazing that this had happened; amazing almost beyond credence that, hidden in the little village, a fisherman, untaught, unconscious even of his own power, had produced a piece of work that had aroused her father, one of the great art critics in France, to such a pitch of elated excitement — but somehow it was not in the least bit amazing that it was *Jean Laparde* who had done it!

Her eyes fixed again on the boat, that was well in now between the reef and the headland; and, with a sudden little gasp, she rose quickly to her feet — it was Jean Laparde himself. What splendid width of shoulder, what strength, and ease, and assurance in the sweep of the oars that bent the blades backward from swirling little eddies, that lifted the heavy boat to send it bounding forward as though it were a feather-weight. It was Jean Laparde — the fiancé of Marie-Louise!

It was to the front at last, that thought! It had been dominant from the moment Marie-Louise had uttered the words, only she had attempted to ignore it, lose it in the other phases of this bewildering morning. But it was out now! Well, what of it? It was an impossible situation this that she had created, was it not? There was no use in denying even to herself that the man had aroused in her — what should she call it? — a desire to cultivate him a little, since he would be so

new, so fresh, so quite different. And Marie-Louise was at the moment now actually in her employ as — one could not call her a servant, it was Marie-Louise's own house, and she was only there to help for a little while at the curé's request — but still — the colour burned red in Myrna's cheeks.

The next instant, she smiled a little. What a simpleton she was! What on earth did it matter! What could it possibly matter! Good heavens, she wasn't going to take this Jean Laparde away from Marie-Louise! *She* wasn't going to marry him! There wasn't the slightest reason in the world why, just when the man turned out to be an embryonic genius and promised to prove really interesting, she should change her attitude toward him — and, anyway, it was almost a foregone conclusion that her father now would monopolise Jean Laparde morning, noon and night.

She glanced at the boat — and started abruptly for the house. To remain there would have been almost too obviously — a meeting. Jean had evidently not gone to the village at all with the other boats — she supposed there were other boats since the curé had spoken of them — but had come directly in from wherever he had been fishing.

She reached the house and through the window watched Jean send the boat sweeping up to the beach, leap from it, and, seemingly without exertion, pull it higher over the sand. He turned then, searching the house with his eyes; and suddenly placed his hands trumpet-fashion to his lips.

“Marie-Louise! Ho, Marie-Louise!” she heard him shout, as he came running up the cliff path from the beach.

Virile in movement, a striking figure, there seemed all of command, something heroic even in the rugged

strength, something absolutely undauntable about the man. And then she laughed merrily to herself, as she stepped to the door. What a change! Who would have believed it! Jean, at sight of her, had stopped as though he had been struck, self-consciousness mocked at the air of command, and through the brown tan of his face crept the red.

"Oh, it is you, Jean!" she exclaimed.

Mechanically he reached up for his cap.

"I—I did not think that mademoiselle had got here yet," he said, the dark eyes in their steady gaze disconcertingly at variance with his stammering speech.

"We've been here ages," she told him quickly. "But the others have gone back again. Marie-Louise has gone to help Nanette with the things. And my father rushed off with that delightful old curé of yours to look for you."

"Rushed off to look for me?" echoed Jean in astonishment. "But I told Jacques Fregeau to tell you that I would come here as soon—"

"Yes, of course, to look for you—but not for the purpose you imagine!" she broke in smiling, and shook her head reproachfully at him. "Jean, do you know that I am quite angry with you! Come here!" She led the way into the house. "Now!"—pointing to the clay figure on the table. "Is not that your work?"

"But, yes, mademoiselle"—there was only a cursory glance at the beacon; his eyes were on this fresh, glorious, wonderful woman, whose white dress of some marvellous texture draped about her with such exquisite, dainty grace . . . and the throat was bare, and full, and white as ivory is white . . . that glint of bronze that was always playing over the massive coils of hair . . . the playful severity in the pursed lips . . . it was intoxication, it was fire . . . he had been drunk with it

all the night, all that morning in the boat while he had fished.

"Then why did you not tell me about it last night?" she demanded.

With a start, he shrugged his shoulders — and perplexity came.

"But it is nothing — that," he said slowly. "What was there to tell, mademoiselle?"

"Nothing!" She stared at him in amazement. "Do you really mean to say that you think it is — nothing?"

"But, of course!" he said simply.

And then suddenly she smiled, and shook her head at him again.

"Did I not tell you last night, Jean, that you were less like a fisherman than any man I had ever seen?"

"Yes; mademoiselle said that." Was there a word of hers that he had forgotten!

"Very well, then," she began magisterially, "since you think nothing of that little statue, I will tell you what I think. It is so much more than 'nothing' that I am going to buy it from you. It is" — her voice changed suddenly, soft in abandon, full in admiration — "oh, Jean, it is superb, magnificent; it is the most beautiful thing I have ever seen; and — and I think I want it more than I have ever wanted anything before."

She had come closer to him, touched him, her hand was on his sleeve, her cheeks were flushed. That look — God, was he mad? — that *same* look was in her eyes again. Yes, he was mad — with a madness that bade him sweep her into his arms and crush her there in all her alluring beauty. He was white — he felt the blood leave his face. She wanted that — wanted that bit of clay that *he* had made!

"It is not for sale, mademoiselle," he said hoarsely; "it is yours."

"No, no, Jean!" she cried. "You do not understand. It is worth — oh, I do not know how much — ever so much money. Father will be able to tell us. It is on account of this that he rushed off to try and find you. He is terribly excited about it."

His hand at his side was clenched; his arm was rigid — he dared not move it for fear she might draw her hand away — it would not come often, a touch of intimacy like that. What did it matter about her father! What did anything matter — but that fiery tide that was whipping through his veins.

"It is good of monsieur, it is good of mademoiselle to praise it," he muttered.

"But it is not good of us!" she asserted earnestly. "Really, I must try to make you understand, Jean. I can't take it under false pretences, you know — you might hate me for it afterwards. I am sure you would. My father says it is a wonderful piece of work — that you are a great artist."

"I?" said Jean — and suddenly in a sweep of passion laughed a little fiercely. "Impossible! But it is enough that mademoiselle, for some reason that I cannot understand, thinks so much of it. It is hers."

"And I tell you that it is not impossible!" she insisted seriously. "Listen, Jean" — her hand closed a little tighter on his arm. "Suppose that I took it, accepted it, and some day you should find that it had become a tremendously famous thing — what then?"

"It would still be unworthy of mademoiselle," he answered, in a low tone.

With a little gasp, she drew back a step and looked at him — but it was the grey eyes that dropped, and for a moment to Jean, unconscious of his own tense

poise, the rapt burning in his eyes, she seemed all glorious with that play of colour now that was even in the pulsing throat. But the next instant she was smiling radiantly.

"Thank you, Jean," she said naively. "I will take it very gladly, and I will always keep it. Father will have a cast of it made at once, and —" she stopped suddenly, turning quickly toward the door. "Listen!" she said. "That's the motor, isn't it? Marie-Louise must have met it on the road."

An automobile had come to a stop by the side of the house; and, a moment later, a girl's voice, high-pitched in sarcasm, reached them.

"*Ma foi!* Fancy! She owns the house! What an aristocrat! No doubt she will expect mademoiselle and monsieur to invite her to table with them next! Oh, *là, là*, but you have lots to learn, *ma petite paysanne!*"

"Oh, let her alone, Nanette!" exclaimed a man's voice sharply. "She has done nothing but answer your own questions, except" — with a laugh — "that she has ridden on the front seat!"

It seemed to come with a shock to Jean that snatch of conversation, as something cold, chilling the fire that but an instant gone had been raging within him. It was an arraignment of himself, a slap in the face, sharply, curtly given, a reminder that for all his temerity he was — a fisherman. Myrna had gone to the front door. He swept his hand in a dazed way across his eyes, then straightened suddenly — it was a spell that he had been under. Nor was the spell gone; but now, at least, he was in control of himself. He walked across the room to where Myrna stood.

"Mademoiselle," he offered quietly, "can I help with the baggage?"

She turned to him, smiling.

“Oh, if you will, Jean!” she cried gratefully. “Please help Jules with the trunks. And afterwards” — her hand was on his sleeve again — “though I must see about arranging things, you mustn’t go away. Father will be back shortly, and you must wait.”

“I will wait,” said Jean.

— VII —

WHERE GLORY AWAITS

HIS back to the cliff, and leaning against the gunwale of his boat, which on landing a little while ago he had drawn up on the beach, Jean dug abstractedly at the sand with the toe of his boot. He had helped Jules, the chauffeur, to carry the baggage into the house, where Myrna Bliss, her maid and Marie-Louise were now busily engaged within — occasionally he could hear one or other of their voices — and he was waiting. What for? He did not know. He had promised her that he would wait. Her father wanted to see him because he made *poupées* out of clay, and because he had made that little statue which, somehow, had so delighted her. It was very curious — very curious that a little thing like that should have taken their fancy!

His hand passed nervously across his forehead. But that was of no account, the statue! There were other things. He was living in a dream — no, not a dream — something much more vital than a dream. From a dream one awoke, and the dream was dispelled. He was awake now and the spell was still upon him. In her presence he lost his reason, his being seemed to become a seething furnace of passion that consumed him; away from her, some strange, magnetic power kept bidding him return, kept his mind picturing her, kept his thoughts upon her. It was but half an hour ago that, alone with her in the cottage, he had almost utterly lost control of himself.

A hot flush was on his cheeks. It was bad, that! Some day he would lose control of himself completely; some day the impulse to crush that ravishing form in his arms, to look deep into those laughing, self-possessed grey eyes until the laughter and the self-possession were gone and he was master, would prove too strong for him. And then — what?

His hands clenched at his sides, the broad shoulders sloped a little forward. Well — what then? His brain would not answer him, save only with that persistent “she was a woman and he was a man.” He laughed shortly aloud. Was that true? How true was it? He glanced mockingly at his clothes; his hands unclenched, and, feeling in a sort of tentative way, slid along the gunwale of the boat. Yes; it was quite evident that he was what he had always been, what he always would be — a fisherman. It was quite evident too that he was mad. It was only last night that he had seen her for the first time, only since last night that this enchantment had fallen upon him — and now it possessed him, mind, soul and body. One could not credit that! He laughed out again — and suddenly the laugh died on his lips.

He had heard no step upon the sand, but a hand now touched his arm. He turned quickly. It was Marie-Louise. He had forgotten all about Marie-Louise — since yesterday evening. He had seen her of course since then, had walked home with her after that meeting on the bridge, had called out for her when he had landed here on the beach a little while ago, but for all that Marie-Louise had been forgotten.

“Jean” — she was speaking in a low, anxious voice — “it’s — it’s not true, is it, Jean?”

The dark eyes were trying to smile through a troubled mist; the lips, that he remembered he had

likened yesterday to the divinely modelled lips of that dream statue, were quivering now.

Jean stared at her. What would she be like if she were dressed in clothes, marvellous, dainty things, such as Myrna Bliss wore, with little shoes and silken ankles? She was pretty of course, Marie-Louise had always been pretty; but there was not the physical thrill, the witchery in the eyes that turned his head. She was more sober — yes, that was it — more sober. Marie-Louise took things more seriously, and —

“Jean!” She seemed almost frightened now in her appeal. “Did you not hear me? Jean — it isn’t true, is it?”

“True?” Jean roused himself with a little start. “What is not true? I do not know what you are talking about.”

“The beacon, Jean” — she spoke hurriedly, breathlessly now. “A few minutes ago mademoiselle told me to put it in the room she has chosen for herself, and to be very careful of it because — because” — her voice broke suddenly — “because she said that you had given it to her. Jean — it’s not true, is it?”

For a moment Jean did not speak. There were tears in her eyes! A twinge of guilty confusion seized him. Yes, it was so — Marie-Louise had been forgotten. Yesterday he had given it to Marie-Louise. But who would have thought it would make any difference to her — a thing like that! She was perhaps angry for the moment, but it would be only for the moment.

“*Mais, sacré nom!*” he exclaimed, and forced a laugh. “And what of it? It is nothing! I will make you another.”

She did not answer; but into the brown eyes came a miserable hurt, and into the face a sudden whiteness. It was only the day before that he had given it to her,

and had said it was a beacon, and that the beacon was herself with arms outstretched to welcome him always. It had meant so much to her — and now it seemed to have meant so little to Jean.

Jean shifted uneasily, as she did not speak.

“ I will make you another, Marie-Louise,” he blurted out appeasingly. “ To-day — to-morrow — whenever you like, I will make you another. Then it will be all right, eh, *petite*? ”

She shook her head — and the words came very slowly.

“ You can never make another beacon, Jean.”

“ How — not another? ” he cried impetuously. “ I can make a thousand! Did I not tell you that it was you — has it not those lips that I could fashion even in the dark, even if you were far away from me! *Tiens*, do you not see — I could make a thousand! And to-morrow you shall have another.”

The dark eyes were full.

“ Was it yours to give, Jean? ” she asked.

It was true! He had nothing to say to that. She was crying. He was angry now because he could say nothing, because there was no excuse for what he had done — and yet he would do it again. But he could not tell Marie-Louise that though, *pardieu*! She would only cry the harder. And because she was right and he had nothing to say, he groped, angry with himself, for some defence.

“ Ah! ” he burst out sharply. “ So that is it! Yesterday you would have thought nothing of it, but now you have been listening to what they say, and you believe it all — that it is worth a great deal of money, maybe a hundred francs, eh? Well, it is not — it is worth nothing! You have nothing to cry over.”

Wide-eyed, as though a whip-lash had curled across

her face, she drew back, her small hands shut tightly at her sides, as she looked at him. And then somehow that little prayer that she had prayed to the *bon Dieu* last night came back to her — “make me that, *mon Père*; make me that — Jean’s beacon all through my life” — and the bitter words that were on her lips were crowded back, and she turned slowly away.

But now Jean caught her arm.

“No, no, Marie-Louise, I did not mean that!” he cried penitently. “See, I did not mean that!”

She made no answer. Her head was averted; her eyes fixed far out over the water.

Jean bit his lips. Certainly he had had no right to give it away, but it was a small matter to make such a fuss over, and he had already promised her another. Was it possible that she had sensed anything of the wild passion that had come upon him for this beautiful American! Was she already jealous? Well, it was easily knocked out of her head, that — if one took the bull by the horns! And if he were mad it was no reason that hurt should come to Marie-Louise because of it. Some day it would be all over this madness, and was it not Marie-Louise and he who were to make their little home together? He forced a laugh again, and caught her shoulders and drew her closer.

“Confess, Marie-Louise,” he said teasingly, “that it is because I gave it to another woman. Is it not so, eh? That you are — oh, *là, là!* — that little Marie-Louise is jealous of mademoiselle.”

Her head lifted, a new light suddenly in her eyes — one of incredulous amazement.

“Jealous of mademoiselle!” she repeated wonderingly. “Of mademoiselle who is of the *grand monde* and so far above us and not of our world at all — and you who are a fisherman! How could I be jealous?”

How could such a thing be possible? Oh, Jean, don't you understand, it is not that you gave it to her — it is that you gave it at all."

"But what does it matter, then," demanded Jean, inwardly relieved, "since I will make you as many more as you please? To-morrow you shall have another much better than this one."

Footsteps sounded from the gravel walk on the cliff above; and Marie-Louise, glancing around, lifted Jean's hands from her shoulders.

"I have told you, Jean, that you can never make another," she said, with a little catch in her voice; then hurriedly: "It is mademoiselle and her father coming to see you. I must go."

"And I have told you," declared Jean, with sudden, fierce assertion, "that I can make a thousand, and all better than this one!"

She bent her head to hide the blinding tears that were filling her eyes again. It meant nothing to him, that which had been so great a pledge to her. It was only a *poupée*, a clay doll, one of dozens that he had given to the children to amuse them. And the things he had said about it meant nothing — they had only been words — only words, but she could not forget them. A little sob rose in her throat, and was choked bravely back. They were coming down the path now, mademoiselle and her father, and she must go.

"You do not understand," she said brokenly — and, turning, ran quickly along the beach.

For a space Jean watched her as she sped over the sand, until, ignoring the path, she climbed lithely up the rocks at the far end of the beach, and disappeared in the direction of the house. His hand, a knotted lump, drawn back for a smashing blow on the gunwale of the boat, a blow that should relieve his feelings, opened

hesitantly instead and passed a little dazedly across his eyes.

"*Sacré maudit!*" he muttered in slow earnestness under his breath.

Since last night the world was upside-down! Since last night he did not know himself! He knew nothing! Only that all Bernay-sur-Mer was changed. That everything was changed. That he had made Marie-Louise cry. That they had talked about that accursed piece of clay that had made Marie-Louise cry, as though it were worth talking about!

"*Sacré maudit!*" muttered Jean again. "What does it all mean?"

And then he was watching her, this glorious American, coming now along the beach toward him with the man who Marie-Louise had said was mademoiselle's father.

"Jean!"—she was calling out to him. "Here is father at last! Did you think we were never coming?"

Two hands fell upon his shoulders, holding him off at arms' length; and the man, with frank eagerness, was staring into his face. Over her father's shoulder, Myrna was laughing roguishly.

"So you are Jean Laparde?" Henry Bliss exclaimed heartily. "Well, well! My daughter told me I would lose half my surprise when I had a good look at you, and I am free to admit she was right." One hand fell from Jean's shoulder, caught Jean's hand and wrung it in a genial grip. "Well, Jean, my boy, I want to say to you that if you will listen to me, this will be a day that you will remember as long as you live."

From one to the other Jean stared bewilderedly.

"It is to the clay figure that monsieur refers, I

know," he said slowly; "but I do not understand. Mademoiselle was kind enough to praise it, but —" He shrugged his shoulders deprecatingly.

"But — nothing!" laughed Henry Bliss impulsively. "Here — sit down!" He sat down himself on the boat's gunwale, and turned to his daughter. "Myrna, we're going to talk business — are you going to stay?"

"Of course, I'm going to stay!" she declared merrily, perching herself beside her father and smiling up at Jean, who still remained standing. "It will take both of us to convince him. Jean, father wants to take you to Paris."

"To Paris!" — the words came from Jean with a sort of startled jerk. His eyes searched the two faces for an instant uncertainly, and then he smiled incredulously. "Mademoiselle is pleased to have a little joke with me — yes?" he said quietly.

It was Henry Bliss who answered.

"Indeed, she is not!" he asserted, with brisk emphasis. "That is exactly what I have to propose, my boy. My daughter tells me she cannot make you believe that the superb little statue you have made amounts to anything more than a gouged-out piece of mud. I'm not so much surprised that you have not sensed its actual worth, for I think that almost invariably the really big men in art, the men of real genius, are the last to appreciate themselves; but the astounding thing is that you have seen nothing in it at all. As a matter of fact, I can't believe it. It is impossible! It is simply that you have given it no thought. Think a little about it, Jean. How did you come to make it? How did you conceive it? Where did you get your model?"

"But I do not know," said Jean a little absently —

something, the fire, the enthusiasm, the earnestness in the other's voice was kindling a strange response within him. "I do not know. I think it was the bronze statue in the great square of the city."

"The — what?" demanded Henry Bliss quickly. "What city? I know them all — and I do not recall anything that could have served as a model for you."

"And you told me, Jean," Myrna added, wagging her finger at him in pretty reproach, "that you had never been away from Bernay-sur-Mer."

Jean laughed uncomfortably, self-consciously.

"It is nothing!" he said. "You do not understand. It is foolish! The statue and the square and the city are only in the dream that comes sometimes."

"Ah — a dream!" ejaculated Henry Bliss, with a quick nod of his head.

"Oh, Jean!" Myrna clapped her hands delightedly. "Tell us about it."

"There is nothing to tell, mademoiselle," he replied, colouring. "It is just a dream that comes sometimes when I am fishing, when I lie awake at night, when I am not thinking of it. That is all, mademoiselle. It means nothing."

"It means a great deal!" said Henry Bliss, jumping excitedly to his feet. "And at least it should help you to understand that it is not so impossible after all when I tell you that, barring little crudities of technique that are a paltry consideration, there is no sculptor in France to-day could produce a piece of work comparable to that which you have done."

Jean's lips were slightly parted. Excitement was upon him too. A strange stirring was in his soul.

"But I cannot believe that," he said in a low voice.

Henry Bliss's hands were on Jean's shoulders once more, pressing them in a hard, earnest grip.

"Nevertheless, it is true!" he asserted forcibly. "You do not know me; but those who do could tell you that I am qualified to speak. And I tell you that it is true. I tell you that in Paris fame, wealth, the greatest name in France awaits you! You are through to-day with this life forever, my boy, if you will come with me to Paris."

Fame, wealth, the greatest name in France! Jean felt the blood leave his face. His brain seemed to whirl and to be afire. Yes, those were the words, and the man was not playing with him; but it was some wild hallucination, some bizarre mistake. To-day, to be through with the hard, penniless life of a fisherman forever — and to work hereafter only with what before had been his play! No, that was not true — it could not be true. He meant well, this man, the father of the girl whose eyes seemed to burn into his now and insist too that it was true, but the little statue had been too easily done to be anything more than perhaps a pretty little thing. Fame, a great name — that strange stirring of his soul again! God, why had this man aroused that thought within him, when it was not, could not be true?"

"Monsieur," he said, and his voice in its hoarseness sounded strangely in his own ears; "monsieur, has made a mistake. It cannot be so."

"Think so!" returned Henry Bliss bluntly. "I do not make mistakes of that kind, my boy. But I will convince you. In a few days you will see. I have telegraphed for some of the famous critics of France, men of the Academy, men whose names are known all over Europe, and they will tell you what I have told you — and their despair that it is I, not they, who have discovered you will be so pitifully genuine that even you will understand. And to-morrow we will motor to

Marseilles and get some modelling clay for you, and you will see for yourself what you can do with that. And then, Jean, you will go to Paris with me — and work.”

“If it were true, if it should be true,” said Jean numbly, “still I could not go. One does not make *sous* enough at the fishing to go to Paris.”

“But, great heavens!” ejaculated Henry Bliss. “That is precisely what I am offering you, young man — money. I am rich. I will pay every expense. I will establish you.”

Jean shook his head.

“I could not do that — take your money,” he said simply.

“Couldn’t take it!” exploded the American earnestly — and then he laughed — and then grew serious once more. “Listen, my boy! I do not want you to think for a moment that this is a purely charitable little scheme on my part — far from it! It is most of it, I am afraid, utter selfishness. I love art — for many years I have devoted myself to it. I cannot create myself — God knows the miserable attempts and the miserable failures that have been mine! — and so I have tried to help others to do what I could not do myself” — Henry Bliss was smiling now in a kindly, wistful way. “And now to discover the greatest sculptor of the age, to bring him out of obscurity into fame and power — can you not see, Jean, how selfish I am? And so why do you stand there hesitating?”

Into Myrna’s face, for the girl had risen and was now standing beside them, into the man’s face so close to his, Jean stared — and then his eyes swept about him, over his surroundings. It was magnificent, but it was not reality — for here was the beach, and here was the boat, and in the boat were his nets, and there

was the nick in the handle of the oar where he had fended off that night from the Perigeau Reef, and out there, surf-splashed, was the reef itself, and his clothes were the same rough, coarse clothes that he always wore just like every other fisherman in Bernay-sur-Mer. It was magnificent, but it was not reality — and yet his heart was pounding with mighty hammer beats, and the blood was surging fiercely through his veins.

“And as for the money,” Henry Bliss went on quietly. “You need have no qualms on that score, my boy. Pay it back by all means, if you’ll feel the better for it. In a year, two years, you’ll be a wealthy man. Why, Jean, don’t you understand — there isn’t one of the men who will be here shortly but would pay you any price you chose to ask for that little statue you gave to my daughter here? So, even on a basis of dollars and cents alone, as it stands now, you couldn’t owe me anything, don’t you see?”

What were they saying to him! Fame, a great sculptor, wealth, a name, his name, the name of Jean Laparde to be known throughout all France! Why did it come back to him now, that night of the great storm when he had stood and watched the scene, rapt and awed, on his way to Marie-Louise? What strange blasphemy was that, that had been his, that had envied the *bon Dieu* the creation of that mighty picture?

“Jean” — Myrna had caught his arm, her head was between her father’s now and his, the soft, bronzed hair for an instant brushed his forehead, her breath was on his cheek, the grey eyes were smiling into his — “Jean, wouldn’t you like to go to Paris?”

To Paris! She lived in Paris — she was always in Paris — always there. A day, a week, two weeks, a month he would have seen her here — in Paris there

would be neither days nor weeks nor months to count. The grey eyes were veiled suddenly, demurely, under the long lashes — but the little hand on his arm, with a quick, added pressure, remained. His head swam dizzily — there was an untamed, pulsing elation upon him, a greed for her that racked and tormented him, a greed to clasp her head between his hands and lift up her face and press kiss after kiss upon those eyelids, that mouth, until in the very insatiability of his passion she should fling her arms around his neck and return his embrace!

“Yes — *yes!*” he said tensely, fiercely. “*Mon Dieu*, yes — I would like to go to Paris!”

Her hand fell from his arm.

“Oh, Jean — I’m so glad!” — it seemed as though she were whispering softly to him.

“Good!” cried Henry Bliss enthusiastically, with a double slap on Jean’s shoulder.

Jean did not speak. It was not easy in an instant to quench that fire that was devouring him, it was not easy to understand that to-day all his life was to be changed. He looked at Myrna — the grey eyes were gaily mocking him, as she nodded her head. He looked at her father — Henry Bliss was laughing ingenuously like a pleased school-boy.

“I know just how you feel!” said Henry Bliss genially. “All up in the air — eh? Well, I feel that way myself. It is the most amazing thing that ever happened! It seems as though there were a dozen questions I wanted to ask you all at once. And to begin with, those *poupées* now, how did you — no, hold on! Myrna, we’ll motor over to Marseilles for the clay to-day, instead of waiting until to-morrow. We’ll have something else to show old Bidelot by the time

he gets here! You go up to the house and order an early luncheon. Jean will join us, and we'll have from now to Marseilles and back again to talk."

"Splendid!" agreed Myrna. "You will, won't you, Jean?"

"I?" said Jean, in sudden dismay. He, to eat with the *grand monde*! But perhaps he had not understood — they would give him lunch with Jules and Nanette and Marie-Louise. He had heard Nanette make that very plain to Marie-Louise a little while ago. "I — I have my dinner with me," he stammered, and pointed to a paper parcel in the stern of the boat. "I will be ready when mademoiselle and monsieur are ready."

"Oh, will you?" laughed Henry Bliss. "Well, I guess not! You'll come up and lunch with Myrna and me."

"No," said Jean, embarrassed, "I —"

"Yes, you will," insisted Henry Bliss.

"Why, Jean," expostulated Myrna, "of course you will, we —" she stopped abruptly. "Oh!" she exclaimed. "I think I know! It's what that stupid Nanette said to Marie-Louise about sitting at table with us, isn't it?"

"What's that?" demanded Henry Bliss quickly. "What has Marie-Louise to do with — h'm — yes — I remember" — his face screwed up perplexedly. "Her fiancé, she said — h'm — yes — it *is* a bit awkward, isn't it?"

"It's nothing of the kind!" declared Myrna, and, with a laugh, possessed herself of the paper parcel from the boat. "It's quite a different matter. If only half of what father has said is true, Jean, it would be an honour for any one to have Jean Laparde as a guest. And anyway I've got your lunch now!" She waved

it in the air, threatening him merrily with it; then turned, and ran toward the house. "You come when you're called, sir!" she flung back over her shoulder, laughing again.

— VIII —

SHADOWS BEFORE

WHO, in all France, a week ago, had heard of Bernay-sur-Mer? Upon whose lips to-day was not the name of that little Mediterranean village? Men, the great men of France, came at the bidding of their confrere, the American millionaire art-critic; came sceptically — and stayed to wonder. And because there were no accommodations in Bernay-sur-Mer, they made their headquarters at Marseilles, and their daily pilgrimages from there; an arrangement that, if in a measure inconvenient, was not without its compensation, for at Marseilles was being made the plaster cast of that exquisite little figure, fashioned so amazingly from scarcely more than mud, that marked a new epoch to them in the world of sculpture, the birth of a supreme genius, a surpassing glory for the art of France!

They came and watched Jean at his work; for there was clay now such as Jean had never imagined, clay that seemed to give form itself, of its own initiative, to wonderful conceptions. They watched and marvelled; and at night they carried him back with them to Marseilles to fête him, until indeed to Jean the world of yesterday was as some vast haze, befogged, that had shut down behind him.

“In a year, with the study of technique in Paris!” murmured Henry Bliss ecstatically.

And old Bidelot, seventy years of age, grizzle-

haired, the most caustic, bitter critic of them all, stormed in his wrath.

“Technique! You talk of technique — for *him*! He is a school in himself — a school that will revolutionise the art. You talk of technique for a genius awakened out of the sleep of ignorance, who in a day accomplishes undying work that no other man in Paris, in Rome — bah! where you will — could accomplish in twice a lifetime! You are senile, my poor friend Bliss — you are in your dotage!”

Jean Laparde! Was it possible that this was Jean Laparde? The simple fisherfolk stared awe-struck at each other, at the metamorphosis that had come to Bernay-sur-Mer, at the great people who came and went, to whom one instinctively lifted one's hat — the great people who now lifted their hats to Jean. It was true! Could they not see with their own eyes? One, too, then, should lift one's hat to Jean. And did not the good Father Anton read to them from the newspapers that all France was ringing with the name of Jean Laparde?

“*Sacré nom d'un miracle!*” swore Pierre Lachance heavily. “And once he made clay *poupées* for little Ninon! *Bon Dieu*, think of that!”

Bernay-sur-Mer had set Jean apart, above itself.

But the old curé was troubled in his heart. And one night, after a week had gone since the American strangers had come to Bernay-sur-Mer, Father Anton shook his head over his newspaper as he read of Jean Laparde — and found difficulty with his spectacles, for his thoughts were of Marie-Louise.

It was only a week ago that she had come to him so happily, so gladly, the proud light in her eyes, to talk of the great thing Jean had done — and she had changed a great deal in the week. The proud light

would come back quickly enough at mention of Jean, but she had grown strangely quiet and silent. And Jean, too, had changed. It seemed, as indeed it was true, that Jean was no longer one of the village.

The old priest took off his offending spectacles, rubbed them with his handkerchief, and replaced them only to find that the mistiness was in his own wet eyes.

Jean did not seem the same in his new clothes. Of course, it was quite natural that Jean should have discarded his fisherman's dress. Mademoiselle Bliss had said very truly that though it might be picturesque in Bernay-sur-Mer, in Paris it would be only eccentric; and besides, to go to Marseilles with his new friends of his new world, one needed to be dressed as they were not to be ridiculous. Monsieur Bliss had been very generous. The American was very whole-heartedly interested in his protégé. Jean would lack for nothing that either money or influence could procure.

But it was not only the clothes — Jean himself had changed. Father Anton shook his head again slowly. It had come gradually during the week, and he, who loved Jean as a son, had not failed to see it. At first it had been amazement, bewilderment, incredulity, then a dawning belief in the genius of his power that they preached to him, and then a fierce assurance that it was so; it had begun with wonder at the camaraderie with which the famous men who had come there treated him, at the respect that Bernay-sur-Mer paid to him — and it had ended with the acceptance of it as his due, and had come to be looked for with a tinge of arrogance as though he had drunk of heady wine. Yes, it was a change! Jean was afire now, a different man, consumed, possessed with the lure of fame, the golden vista that was before his eyes, steeping his soul in it, reaching out to it, straining toward it like a young eagle

that suddenly liberated from captivity takes wings to the great void.

And so the paper slid unheeded to the floor from the old priest's knees that night, a week after the American strangers had come to Bernay-sur-Mer, and the spectacles were removed again — but this time the eyes were wiped. He was glad for Jean, proud in his love for the greatness that was to come — but somehow in his heart there was sadness, too. It seemed that between Marie-Louise and Jean a shadow crept, and lengthened, and there was a parting of the ways.

“I love you both, my children, Marie-Louise and Jean,” the old curé whispered. “I am an old man. Perhaps I am foolish in my fears. I pray the good God for you both.”

— IX —

FORKED ROADS

IT was the room Myrna Bliss had occupied. Mother Fregeau had insisted; Jacques Fregeau had implored. It was fitting that the best at the Bas Rhône should be Jean's. The little back room that had been his for ten years was quite impossible. It was different now. It would be but to make him ridiculous — what with all these grand strangers that were around him! And besides, *merveille du bon Dieu*, was he not now himself the greatest of the great ones!

In through the window the late afternoon sun played over the faded wallpaper of the *chambre de luxe*; from without there was the hum of voices, exclamations of amazement, cries of delight and admiration, the curious composite sound of a gathered, eager crowd. And Jean, well back from the sill that he might not be seen, glanced outside. It was his — his! The work that he had done during the past week in the *atelier* they had made for him in the barn behind the Bas Rhône! It was finished! Monsieur Bidelot was exhibiting it now to Bernay-sur-Mer. The great Academician was standing in the tonneau of the automobile and holding it up for every one to look at — the fisherman with his boat and net in clay. Ah, they understood that, the people of Bernay-sur-Mer! But they understood only that it was magnificent because Bidelot and Monsieur Bliss and the great men who had come amongst them told them that it was magnificent.

For years he had made the *poupées*, and they had seen nothing — and he had seen nothing. But now they knew because they were told; and now he knew because his soul, his brain was ablaze with the knowledge of creative power, because what had gone before was nothing, because what was to come would sweep the past, that little thing that Bidelot in his emotion cried over, into insignificance.

He drew back, his head high; his outflung arms, hands clenched, stretched heavenward. These strangers, these great critics had said it, and it was so! The name of Jean Laparde would never die!

He stripped off the long sculptor's apron that covered him from neck to knees, and held it out at arm's length, gazing first at it and then at the rough fisherman's clothes that hung, where Mother Fregeau had placed them, on the end peg on the wall — a little apart, significantly it seemed, whether by accident or design, from the new clothes that had come from Marseilles. And then he laughed out suddenly in a quick, exalted way, and tossed the apron on the bed. It was all changed, that! He was through with the fisherman's dress, he was through with Bernay-sur-Mer! To-night he was to dine with Bidelot and a score of others in Marseilles, and after that in a few days it would be — Paris.

He undressed hurriedly, and began to dress again in a clean suit — but a little slowly now, none too deftly. They were still strange to him these clothes; but then everything was strange. The people around him were strange. At times he felt awkward, constrained in their presence — and at times he could laugh down at them as from a superior height. Ay, he could laugh — they were at his feet! Only — he frowned heavily — he could not laugh at Myrna Bliss. He was not

master there! And yet she, somehow, did not erect the barrier. It was himself that did that — because he could not forget that behind the roguish smile in the grey eyes might lurk the thought that, after all, he was only a fisherman.

A fisherman! They were cheering now outside. His hands shut tightly. A fisherman! He was no longer a fisherman! He was Jean Laparde, a sculptor of France, a man before whom lay a path of glory, a man whom the nation would acclaim, a man of whose future all stood in envy! They had told him that, these men whom France had already honoured, these men who had accepted him as more than their equal. But there was no need for them to tell him — he knew it in his soul. None, no man, the world itself, could hold back now the genius of Jean Laparde!

Paris! He was pacing the room now, his eyes afire. To-morrow or the next day, when the Blisses had made their plans, Paris and fame was his. What a life it was that now opened out before him! A place amongst the highest, the world to resound with the name of Jean Laparde — and those grey eyes, that bronze hair, that glorious beauty of the American — God! he would immortalise her in clay, in bronze, in marble.

Ay, they might well cheer while the chance was theirs, these people of Bernay-sur-Mer! To-morrow or the next day he would be saying good-bye to them, and — he stood suddenly still — and good-bye, too, to Marie-Louise. The thought put a damper upon his spirits; his brows gathered in deep furrows of impatient perplexity.

He had not seen much of Marie-Louise in the last week — he had seen her scarcely at all. Only twice — when she with many others had stood in the door-

way to watch his work. She had smiled at him then, as though it were her work, too, as though it were a joint proprietorship — but she had gone before he could speak to her. And at the cottage, when he had been there at the invitation of Myrna or her father, Marie-Louise, strangely enough, now that he thought of it, was never to be seen.

He would have to speak to her, of course, about going away; but what chance, with the whirl he had been in, had he had to do it? She would know that he was going to Paris, for everybody knew it — but he would have to speak to her himself about it before he went. And what was he to say? Certainly, he loved Marie-Louise — but the great chance of his life was before him. What was he to say to her? He would go to Paris for a time, make this great name for himself, and then afterwards — *what?*

He refused to tolerate the question. He had refused to tolerate it all week. It was enough for the present that he was going for a time to Paris. Marie-Louise was sensible enough not to make a scene. She could see readily enough that he must go and that she must stay. How, for instance, could she associate with women of fashion and society like Myrna Bliss, who would be the women of the new world that must necessarily form part of his life hereafter. What was he thinking of? Was it the “afterwards” again? Was he not coming back to Marie-Louise? Was he choosing now between his art and Marie-Louise? No; he was not — he would not! That was an issue for the future. It would work itself out. Why should he plague himself about it!

He loved Marie-Louise, of course; but it would have been easier now if there had been nothing between them. He could not go to Marie-Louise and say: Marie-Lou-

ise, I love you; but it is finished — you can see that the *grand monde* would make a very great difference between Jean Laparde, the great sculptor, and Marie-Louise the fisherwoman of Bernay-sur-Mer. No; he could not say that, but — *sacré nom!* — was he back to the everlasting “afterwards” again, when he refused so resolutely to go beyond the present? Was it not enough that he was simply going to Paris for a time — a matter that would seem natural enough to her, and of which she would be glad because great things had come to him? He would talk to her like that — that would be enough — Marie-Louise was a sensible girl. One could not say to her that it would be better to finish everything, he would never say that to Marie-Louise — but if, *par exemple*, he and Marie-Louise had never talked of the marriage there would be nothing now to trouble him. And — he swung around sharply as a knock sounded on the door.

“Come!” he called.

Papa Fregeau stuck in his head.

“*Pardon*, Monsieur Jean” — it was “monsieur” now — “it is Mademoiselle Bliss who is alone in the café below. Will Monsieur Jean see her for a moment before he goes out?”

“In an instant,” Jean answered quickly. “Tell mademoiselle that I will be there in an instant.”

Papa Fregeau hesitated, stared about the room, and stared at Jean, his fat cheeks grotesquely expanded — and his arms rose suddenly in a gesture of profound helplessness.

“*Mon Dieu!*” he muttered heavily. “Is it possible that it is our little Jean there — ah, *pardon*” — he stammered — “*Monsieur Jean*” — and made a hasty exit from the room, as though utterly confounded at his own temerity.

But Jean, following his reply, had paid no further attention to Papa Fregeau. He had learned to knot the long, flowing tie that Myrna had chosen as part of his dress, for she had said, had she not, that it was the tie the artists wore in Paris? He knotted it now with extra care, put on his coat, snatched up his hat, and ran downstairs to the café below.

She was waiting for him back by the little *comptoir* where he had stood that evening when she had first spoken to him. She had been like a glorious vision that had burst suddenly upon him that evening — she was a thousand times more glorious now, for her smile was eager with an intimacy that promised — what did it promise? He did not know. It was there — and her eyes were shining, and the white throat was divinely beautiful — and the thrill of her presence quickened the beat of his heart.

Her laugh rang through the room, silver-toned.

“Jean,” she cried merrily, “you are harder to see these days than a prime minister! What do you mean, sir? Have you deserted us?”

“*Ma foi!*” protested Jean, a little anxiously. “Mademoiselle does not mean that! Was I not at lunch with her to-day, and yesterday, and the day before that?”

“Yes, and all day at the work, and every evening in Marseilles” — she manufactured a dainty pout through her smile. “And even now that I have snatched a little moment, I must not keep you for they are waiting for you outside.”

“Let them wait!” said Jean tensely.

“Oh, no; we mustn’t do that,” she said laughingly, shaking her head. “So listen, Jean. I have come to tell you that — can you guess what? That you are not going to Paris with us after all.”

"Not going to Paris!"—Jean gazed at her bewilderedly, as he repeated the words.

"With *us* — silly boy!" she smiled teasingly. "Are you disappointed?"

She teased, and mocked, and delighted him, and fired his blood by amazing and elusive turns. He could not cope with her yet.

"But mademoiselle knows," he blundered. "I — I do not understand. It is a great disappointment."

"Then it mustn't be!" she declared brightly. "For it is my idea, and if you are not pleased with it, it is I who will be terribly disappointed. It is just a little while ago that father and I arranged the plans. We are to go to-morrow direct to Paris, and as soon as we get there — now listen very attentively, Jean! — we are going to pick out an *atelier* for you and fit it up. And you are not to come until we send you word that everything is ready. And the day you arrive I shall be hostess at the studio at a reception to which all Paris will be invited. Everybody that is worth while will come, and your entrée will be a triumph. Now, Jean, will that not be splendid?"

She was smiling at him, vivacious, flushed with excitement. Splendid — yes, it would be splendid! An entrée to Paris like that! It was the first tangible glimpse of reality out of the chaotic blaze of luring, golden dreams.

"It — it is too good of mademoiselle!" he stammered excitedly.

Low, musical, her laugh rippled through the room again, as she looked at him. The man was magnificent — the head, the shoulders, the splendid strength, the mobile, changing lights and shadows in his face like a child who had not yet learned to mask its emotions, and all this coupled with the deliciously picturesque

background of the discovery of his art, would make him the rage in Paris. Paris would literally go wild over him! And she? Well, he would be still more a new sensation than ever — and perhaps, who knew? — but the man was too easily aroused — and then there was the possibility that her father, that Bidelot and the others had overrated him, that he would be but the phenomenon of the moment, only to sink after a while into uninteresting mediocrity — she would see. But for the present at least Paris would echo and re-echo with the name of Jean Laparde. Her eyebrows arched demurely, innocently. There was something else she had to say to Jean. She had never spoken to him of Marie-Louise — naturally. But she must speak now. Marie-Louise, a peasant girl, a bare-footed fisherwoman, in Paris as Jean's fiancée was perfectly impossible!

“Jean,” she said ingenuously, “you know we took the cottage without much formality as far as any definite length of time was concerned. Of course we expected to stay longer, and if all this had not happened we certainly should have done so. So, do you think, when we speak to Marie-Louise about going, that she would be perfectly satisfied with a month's rent? I told father I would ask you.”

Jean's face clouded.

“You have not told Marie-Louise then that you are going to-morrow?” he asked slowly.

“How could we — when we did not know ourselves until a little while ago?” she answered.

“No; that is so,” he said. Then, with a short, conscious laugh: “I have not spoken to Marie-Louise myself.”

“Of course you haven't!” she returned quickly. “And you have been wise.”

“Wise?”—Jean looked at her, puzzled.

“Marie-Louise is not blind,” said Myrna quietly. “It is far better that she should have seen things for herself—and she could not help seeing them during the last week.”

“You mean?” Jean began—and stopped.

“You know what I mean, Jean,” she said gravely. “That she must have seen what everybody else sees—what you see yourself. That if she ever had any idea of going to Paris with you, it is quite out of the question. It is different now—everything is changed. You are not a fisherman any longer; you have a great place to take in the world that she cannot take beside you. A week in Paris and, even if neither of you see it now, you would both see it only too bitterly and clearly then. For both your sakes it is better settled now.”

Jean was staring across the room to where, outside, the crowd was packed densely in the road. Had he not thought of just those things that she had been saying? Had he not thought of them all week? They were true; but still there was Marie-Louise who—what was that? They were cheering him there outside—it made his blood tingle, he felt the mad elation of it, his soul seemed to leap out to meet the acclaim!

“But that is not all, Jean”—she was speaking again. “There is another thing, something you owe to—oh, how shall I say it?—to your country, and—” She stopped suddenly and caught his arm. “Listen!” she breathed. “Listen!”

It was Bidelot, the great Academician, his voice raised in impassioned words. Through the window they could see him standing, bare-headed, in the automobile.

“. . . Bernay-sur-Mer will evermore live in the

hearts of Frenchmen — you have given to France the immortal name of Jean Laparde."

Her hands, both of them now, were clasped tightly on his arm.

"Jean!" she whispered. "Jean!"

"*Mon Dieu!*" — the words came hoarsely from Jean's throat. They were cheering again. He moved, like iron impelled to the magnet, across the room. He looked at Myrna. He had never seen her eyes so bright.

"It is only the beginning, Jean" — she seemed half hysterical herself. "But in Paris, Jean — in Paris you shall see!"

They were at the door, and suddenly she flung it wide open. There was a roar of voices. She was smiling at him from the doorway. They were shouting his name. They rushed at him, and, lifting him shoulder high, carried him to the automobile. Fame — was this only a taste of it? No more than that? In Paris — what was it he should see in Paris? They were shouting again. It was like some fiery draught that his soul was drinking in. He craved it with a lust that was passionate, all-possessing. He cried out to those around him. He did not know what he said. And then Bidelot was speaking to him, and the automobile was whirling down the road, followed by the shouts of all Bernay-sur-Mer.

All Bernay-sur-Mer? No; not all. For as the car flashed by, halfway between the little bridge and the eastern headland, the fringe of bushes by the roadside parted, a dark head lifted, and Marie-Louise gazed after it. It was all so strange, and she could not quite understand. Once, twice before, on other evenings, she had watched the car pass. They were all of the great world those men with Jean in the car; of the

great world of which she knew nothing, only that the village spoke of the strangers with awe. And now Jean was one of them — and they seemed so proud of him, so proud to make him one of themselves, these great men. And she was proud of him, too, oh, so proud and glad and happy — only back of it all was a little chill of dread and fear, and she could not quite understand. She had smiled at Jean from the edge of the crowd that was clustered around the door of the barn those days when he had been working at the clay — and then she had stolen away and cried so bitterly. She did not know why she had done that. If only some one would tell her what it all meant! Was it because Jean was going away for a little time? The dark eyes widened slowly. Was it only for a little time? She had not talked to Jean since that morning on the beach, and that was so long, long ago. It wasn't Jean's fault, though, nearly so much as hers. She had really tried to evade him. No, not to evade Jean; but to evade the others out of the shyness and diffidence for the great strangers who were now constantly around him. Would there be always these strangers around him?

She drew herself up suddenly, her small hands fiercely clenched. She hated these strangers! That was it! They were always coming between Jean and herself! They were always there! They made of Jean a different man; they made him one of themselves, and in doing that they were snatching him away from her, taking him across what seemed like some vast gulf that she could not traverse herself. She hated this Monsieur American, and this mademoiselle; and she hated the day they had come, for it had all begun that day. The red burned angrily in her cheeks, the lithe form quivered in a quick rush of passion — and then,

instantly penitent, with a little sob, she flung herself down upon the grass.

No; she did not hate them! What had she said! The *bon Dieu* would be very angry with her for that. And they had been very kind and good to her, this monsieur and this mademoiselle. And to hate all the others was to commit a sin, for were they not there because Jean — she raised her head quickly, parting the bushes again, as she caught the sound of steps and voices from the road.

It was Monsieur Bliss speaking in French to Father Anton, who walked between Monsieur Bliss and mademoiselle.

“Why should he not work here? Why should he go to Paris? What a question, my dear Monsieur le Curé! It is because here is nothing; because in Paris there is everything. It is there that he will study the great works of famous sculptors; it is there that he will have models and facilities for his work; it is there that he will have inspiration from the art around him; it is there that, with his genius, he will sift and choose, profiting from the different schools even as he creates a new one for himself; and it is there that the leading men of France will unite with the social world to make the name of Jean Laparde known and honoured wherever art is known.”

“But,” said Father Anton anxiously, “but he will come back — to Marie-Louise.”

Henry Bliss’s hand fell sympathetically upon the old priest’s shoulder, as he shook his head.

“I do not know,” he said soberly. “Who can tell? It depends upon Jean — and Marie-Louise. Frankly, I do not think he will come back, for there is always the danger that the greater he becomes the greater will become the distance between them — and Jean will un-

questionably become a national figure. But it is a vastly different thing with him than it is with her. It is innate in him to take that place gracefully, even as his genius is innate in him. To her, I am afraid, it would be an impossible and an impracticable life. It is likely she would be miserable to begin with and feel herself a drag upon him, for, we must admit, she could not, as we say in America, hold up her end in his new life. It is one of those tragedies of life, isn't it, that we cannot shape one way or the other? It is something they alone must work out. It is not a little matter, this future of Jean's. France has claimed Jean, Monsieur le Curé, and it may well be, as Myrna here said a moment ago, there is no place in his new life for Marie-Louise. I —"

They had passed on.

It seemed to Marie-Louise that she was very cold, that somehow she could not move. There were three figures out there on the road walking along. It was very strange that so ordinary a thing as that should be taking place. She seemed to be numbed, to be waiting somehow for a return to consciousness. Was that consciousness that was returning now, was that it — this dull, monotonous pain? And that great choking in her heart — what was that? She was standing erect, and words were quivering on her lips.

"There is no place in his new life for Marie-Louise."

She was staring out before her; but the road, and, beyond it, the white beach, and, beyond that again, the blue of the sea with the great golden shaft of light from the setting sun upon it was gone — and there was only nothingness. Only her lips moved.

"There is no place — in his new life — for Marie-Louise."

A DAUGHTER OF FRANCE

HOW still the house was! Only once during the night had Marie-Louise heard a sound as she had sat, dressed, by the window in the little attic room. And that sound had been the whir of an automobile rushing by on the road — it had been Jean returning from Marseilles. That was while it was very dark, very long ago — now it was daylight again, and the sun was streaming into the room.

The chaste, sweet face was tired and weary and aged a little; but on the lips, sensitive, delicate, making even more beautiful their contour, was a brave, resolute little smile, as her eyes rested on the small white bed, neatly made, unslept in. It was over now, the fight that had been so hard and so cruel to fight; and she needed only the courage to go on to the end.

Over and over again, all through the night, she had thought it out. She loved Jean. She loved Jean so much! She had trembled once when she had tried to think how much, and the thought had come so quickly, before she could arrest it, that she loved Jean as much as she loved God — and then she had prayed the *bon Dieu* not to be angry with her for the sin, for she had not meant to think such thoughts as that.

It was true what they had said when they had passed by on the road yesterday evening. There was no place in his new life for her. A hundred little things all

through the week had shown her that, only, until yesterday evening when Monsieur Bliss had spoken, she had not understood what they meant — Nanette, that first day, when Jean had come to lunch with mademoiselle and monsieur; the curious, side-long glances that the villagers gave her now; a strange, embarrassed reserve in Father Anton, when the good curé had spoken to her lately; that wide, vast gulf that lay between the world mademoiselle lived in, the world that Jean was going to, and her own world. They had all seen it — except herself. And she had not understood because she had not allowed herself to think what it might mean, what she knew now it meant — that she must lose Jean.

To let Jean go out of her life because France had claimed him — that was what her soul had whispered to her all through the night. A Daughter of France, her Uncle Gaston had called her proudly — it was Jean who had told her what her uncle had said — that he had taught her to love God and be never afraid. But she was afraid now, she had been afraid all through the night, for it seemed as if there were no more happiness, as though a great pain that would never go away again had come to her.

France had claimed Jean. He was to be a famous man. Did they not all talk of his glorious future? It was different with Jean — years ago even she had known that. She herself had told him he was different from the fishermen of Bernay-sur-Mer. Jean was born to the life that he was going to. Was he not even now taking his place amongst these great strangers as though he had been accustomed to do so always? And she, if she should try to do it, they would laugh at her, and she would bring ridicule upon Jean, and she could not do what Jean could do. She was a peas-

ant girl whom mademoiselle scolded about going without shoes and stockings.

And Jean must surely have seen these things, too. But Jean, though he had heedlessly hurt her so when he had given away again the little beacon, would never speak to her of this, because this was a much greater thing which was to change all their lives. It was she who must speak to Jean, it was she who must tell him that she understood that the great future which lay before him must not be harmed; that she must not hold him back; that she must not stand in his way; that she would only hurt him in that dazzling, bewildering world that would disdain a fishergirl; that it was France, not she, who came first.

The night had brought her that. It was only the courage she needed now to act upon it.

She stood up, looking through the window — and the great dark eyes filled with a blinding mist.

“Jean! Jean!” she said brokenly aloud.

A little while she stood there, and then walked slowly across the room to the bed. And as once she had knelt there before, she dropped again upon her knees beside it. And now the smile came bravely again. They were wrong. It was not true. There was a place in his life for her — something that she could do now. There was one way in which her love could still help Jean in the wonderful life that had come to him.

The dark head bent to the coverlet.

“*Mon Père*,” she whispered, “make me that — Jean’s beacon now.”

And after a time she rose, and bathed her face, and fastened the black coils of hair that had become unloosed, and, as she heard Nanette stirring below, went quietly downstairs.

She must see Jean. They were going away to-day, mademoiselle and monsieur, and Nanette and Jules; and Jean was to follow them in a few days. She had heard mademoiselle and her father discussing it at their supper last evening. She must see Jean now before the others went, so — so that everybody would understand.

She stole out of the house, gained the road and started to run along it toward the village. Jean would be up long ago, all his life he had risen hours before this, and she would be back by the time mademoiselle and monsieur were up and needed her. She stopped suddenly, and in quick dismay glanced down at her bare feet. She had forgotten to put on her shoes and stockings. Suppose mademoiselle should see her returning like that!

And then Marie-Louise shook her head slowly, and went on again. It was not right to disobey, but it could not matter very much now, for mademoiselle was going away in the afternoon. And besides she could run much faster without them, and — the tears came with a rush to her eyes — they seemed all at once to mean so much, those shoes and stockings. It — it was the shoes and stockings and all they meant that was taking her out of Jean's life. She understood it all so well now.

She brushed the tears a little angrily from her eyes. She must not do that. To go to Jean and cry! Far better not to go at all! Afterwards, when they were gone, these Americans, and when Jean was gone, and she was alone and only the *bon Dieu* to see, then perhaps the tears would be too strong for her. But now she must talk very bravely to Jean, and not make it harder for him; for, no matter what happened or what

was to come, Jean, too, in his love, would feel the parting.

She understood Jean better now, too. The night had made so many things much clearer. Had he not confessed that he was not always happy as a fisherman in Bernay-sur-Mer? And must it not have been just this, this greatness within him, that had made him discontented? And now that it had come true, a far greater thing than he could have dreamed of, changing his whole life, must it not for the time have made him forget everything else? It had not killed his love for her, it had not done that — but this thing must be first before either of their loves. Afterwards, perhaps, it might kill his love — afterwards, yes, afterwards it might do that. She tried to smile a little. It was what she was going now to bring about — afterwards it *must* kill his love. It was the only way. And that would come surely, very surely — his giving away of the beacon, so lightly forgetting what he told her it had meant, taught her that. If he went now, if she bade him go now, it was not for a little time — it was for always.

She was running, very fast, breathlessly — as though she were trying to outrun her thoughts. It was coming again, the same bitter fight that she had fought out through the darkness, through all those long hours alone — but she must not let it come, that sadness, that yearning that tried to make her falter and hold back. The way was very plain. If she loved Jean, if she really loved him, she must not let that love do anything but what would help him in his new, great life — she must cling to that. It would not be love if she did anything else; it would only mean that she loved herself more than she loved Jean.

“To be never afraid”—Uncle Gaston had taught her that, and the words were on her lips now —“To be never afraid.”

She was walking again now, for she had reached the village. Some one called to her from a cottage door, and she called back cheerfully as she passed on to the Bas Rhône, where Papa Fregeau was standing in the doorway.

“*Tiens, petite!*” the fat little proprietor cried heartily. “But it is good to see our little Marie-Louise! You do not come often these days. They make you work too hard, those Americans, perhaps? But to-day they are going — eh? Wait, I will call Lucille.”

“Good morning, Jacques,” she answered. “Yes; it is to-day that they are going, so do not call Mother Fregeau, for there is a great deal to do at the house and I must hurry back.”

“Ah!” observed Papa Fregeau. “You have come then with a message?”

“Yes,” she said hurriedly; “for Jean. Do you know where he is?”

“But, *là, là!*” chuckled Papa Fregeau. “But, yes; he is upstairs in his room. But wait — I must tell you. I have just helped him carry it up. It is a very grand American affair, and he is like a child with it. It arrived from Marseilles last night after he had gone.”

“What did?” inquired Marie-Louise patiently.

“What did!” ejaculated Papa Fregeau. “But did I not tell you? The American trunk, *pardieu!* that he is to go away with, and —” The fat little man grew suddenly confused. “*Tiens!*” he stammered. “He is upstairs in his room, Marie-Louise. I am an old fool — eh — an old fool!” — and he waddled away.

Why should it have hurt a little more because

Jacques Fregeau had said Jean was going away? And why should Jacques Fregeau have been able to read it in her eyes? She was not so brave perhaps as she had thought. And her heart was pounding now very quickly and so hard that it brought pain, as she went up the stairs.

"*Mon Père*" — her lips were whispering the same prayer over again — "make me that — Jean's beacon now."

And then she was knocking at the door.

For an instant she hesitated, as his voice called to her to enter; then she opened the door and stepped inside. It was Jean, this great fine figure of a man, who turned so quickly toward her; but it was already the Jean of the world where they wore shoes and stockings, and his clothes were like the clothes of Monsieur Bliss. They made him very handsome, very grand; only somehow they made it seem that her errand was useless now, that she had come too late, that Jean was already gone.

Her eyes met his, smiled — and, from his face, strayed about the room. It was very fine that American trunk, but not very large. It was like one that mademoiselle had, that she called a steamer trunk, and carried on the automobile — and the trunk was empty, and the tray was on the floor beside it.

"Marie-Louise!" he cried — and then, a little awkwardly, he caught her hands. "But — but what has brought you here, Marie-Louise?"

"To see you, Jean," she told him simply.

For a moment he stared at her uneasily. Was this then to be the scene that he had dreaded, that he had been putting off? And then he laughed a little unnaturally.

"Ah, did you think, then, Marie-Louise, that I had

forgotten you? You must not think that! Only, *mon Dieu*, what with Bidelot, and the critics, and Marseilles, and the work all day at the new design, what could I do? But Bidelot and the rest have returned to Paris, and mademoiselle and monsieur go to-day; and this afternoon I was going to find you and tell you about the great plans they have all made for me."

"Yes; I know, Jean," she answered. "And that is what I have come for — to have a little talk about you and me."

"About my going away, you mean?" he said, infusing a lightness into his voice. "But you must not feel sad about that, Marie-Louise. You would not have me lose a chance like that! And it is only for a little while, until I have learned what, they say, Paris will teach me. I shall do great things in Paris, Marie-Louise — and then I shall come back."

She shook her head slowly.

"Jean," she said very quietly, "it is about your coming back that I want to speak to you. I have thought it all out last night. It is not for a little while. When you go it is for always. You can never come back."

"Never come back! Ah, is it that then that is troubling you?" he said eagerly. "You mean that you would not mind my going for a little while, only you think it is for more than that?"

"You do not understand, Jean"—it seemed as though she must cry out in wild abandon, as though the tears must come and fill her eyes, as though she were not brave at all. Would not the *bon Dieu* help her now! She drew her hands away from him, and turned from him for an instant. "You can never come back, Jean; you can never come back to the old life. You will go on and on, further and further away from it, making a great name for yourself, and your friends

will be all like the *grand monde* who have been here, and I know that I cannot go into that life, too — I understand that all so well. And — and so, Jean, I have come to tell you that you are free.”

“Free!” he cried — and gazed at her in stupefaction. The colour came and went from his face. He had not thought of this from her! And yet it was what he had said in his soul — if only there were nothing between Marie-Louise and himself! It was as if a weight had been lifted from him — only replacing the weight was a miserable pricking of conscience. “Free! What are you saying?”

And now the dark eyes were bright and deep and unfaltering — and suddenly she drew her form erect, and her head was thrown proudly back.

“Free, Jean, because you must not think any more of me; because you are to be a great man in your country and it is your duty to go, for France has called you, and France is first; because” — her voice, quivering, yet triumphant, was ringing through the room — “because I give you to France, Jean! You do not belong to me now — you belong to France!”

For a moment he did not speak. There seemed a thousand emotions, soul-born, surging upon him. Her words thrilled him; it was over; there was relief; it was done. She had gone where he had not dared to go in his thoughts — to the end. He would never come back, she said. He was free. But he could not have her think that he could let her go like that!

“No, no, Marie-Louise!” he burst out. “Do you think that even if I belonged to France, even if all my life were changed, that I could ever forget you, that I could forget Bernay-sur-Mer, and all the people and my life here?”

“Yes,” she said, “you will forget.”

"Never!" he asserted fiercely.

"Jean"—her voice was low again—"it is the *bon Dieu* last night who has made me understand. I do not know what is in the new world that you are going to, only that you will be one of the greatest and perhaps one of the richest men in France. And I understand you better, Jean, I think, than you understand yourself. This fame and power will mean more to you than anything else, and it will grow and grow and grow, Jean. And, oh, Jean, I am afraid you will forget that it is not you at all who does these great things but that it is the *bon Dieu* who lets you do them, and that you will grow proud, Jean, and lose all the best out of your life because you will even forget that once those clothes hanging there"—she pointed toward the rough fisherman's suit—"were yours."

It was strange to hear Marie-Louise talking so! He did not entirely understand. Something was bewildering him. She was telling him that he must think no more of her, that it was finished. And there was no scene. And she did not reproach him. And there were no tears. And it did not seem as though it were quite real. He had pictured quite another kind of scene, where there would be passion and angry words. And there was nothing of that—only Marie-Louise, like a grown-up Marie-Louise, like a mother almost, speaking so gravely and anxiously to him of things one would not expect Marie-Louise to know anything about.

She turned from him impulsively; and from the peg took down the cap and the rough suit, and from the floor gathered up the heavy boots with the coarse socks tucked into their tops—and, as he watched her in amazement, she thrust them suddenly into his arms.

"Promise me, Jean," she said in the same low way, "that you will keep these with you always, and that

sometimes in your great world you will look at them and remember — that they, too, belong to France ”— and then suddenly her voice broke, and she had run from the room.

She was gone. Jean's eyes, from the doorway, shifted to the clothes that cluttered up his arms — and for a long time he did not move. Then one hand lifted slowly, and in a dazed sort of way brushed the hair back from his eyes. It was a strange thing, that — to take these things with him to remember — what was it she had said? — to remember that they, too, belonged to France.

“ *Mon Dieu!* ” he whispered — and, with a queer lift of his shoulders, turned mechanically to the trunk beside him. “ *Mon Dieu!* ” he whispered again — and now there was a twisted little smile of pain upon his lips as understanding came, and almost reverently he laid the things in the bottom of the trunk.

— XI —

THE PENDULUM

HOW many miles had they come? Jean did not know. It had been far — but far along a road of golden dreams, where time and distance mattered only because they were so quickly passed.

It was Myrna Bliss who had suggested it because, had she not said? she wanted to have a little talk with him alone before she left for Paris that afternoon — and they would walk out along the road before her father started, and the automobile would pick her up on the way.

And so they had come, and so she had talked and he had listened — feasting his eyes upon the superb, alluring figure that swung, so splendidly supreme, along beside him. She had told him of Paris — Paris, the City Beautiful — of the great city that was the glory of France, of its magnificent boulevards, its statues, its arches, its wonderful architecture, its wealth of art garnered from the ages, its happy mirth, its gaiety, its richness and its life, the life that would now be his. And he had listened, rapt, absorbed, fascinated, as though to some entrancing melody, now martial, now in softer strain, that stirred his pulse as it carried him beyond himself, and unfettered his imagination until it swept, free as a bird in air, into the land of dreams, that knew a fierce, ecstatic echo in his soul — the melody of her voice.

But now there had come a jarring note into that mel-

ody; and a sudden, swift emotion, that mingled dismay, a passionate longing, a panic sense of impotency, was upon him. The quick throb of the motor was sounding from down the road behind them. Monsieur Bliss was coming now. In a moment she would be gone.

She had heard it, too, for she ceased speaking abruptly, and, halting, turned to face him.

"Isn't it too bad, Jean?" she cried disappointedly. "And I had hardly begun to tell you about it! But then, never mind, the rest of it all you will see for yourself in a few more days, when you get to Paris."

In a moment she would be gone! What was it that held him back — that had always held him back before? He was strong enough — strong enough to crush her to him, to cover that gloriously beautiful face with his kisses, to bathe his face in the fragrance of her hair, to feel her heart, the throb, the pulse, the life of her body against his own! What was it that, strong as he was, was stronger than he?

"It — it is good-bye," he said, in a low, tense way.

She felt the passion that was possessing him — he read it in the startled glance of the grey eyes before they were veiled; in the ivory of the perfect throat grown colourful with the mounting red; in the parted lips before the teasing, merry smile was forced there, as she stepped back a little away from him. She knew! She knew, as he knew, that his soul was aflame — and it was she, not he, who dammed back the tide of his passion with that "something" that was so powerful an ally of hers, so readily, so always at her instant command. She knew, as he knew, that his soul was aflame — and yet she had not repulsed him. What did it mean? That she *cared*! But why did she laugh so lightly now, why was she so perfectly self-possessed? What did it mean? That she was playing with him!

"How absurd, Jean!" she laughed gaily. "Of course, it isn't 'good-bye'; that is"—she glanced at him demurely—"that is, unless you've changed your mind about coming to Paris." Then, impulsively eager: "But you haven't done that, have you? And you want to come more than ever now after what I have told you, don't you? And, Jean"—she came suddenly close to him again, and her face, its demureness gone, was puckered up in very earnest little wrinkles—"there isn't anything, you won't let anything keep you from coming—will you?"

Keep him from Paris—from her! Why had she asked that? He laughed out boisterously, harshly. It was very near now, that accursed automobile! Monsieur Bliss was calling out to them. Keep him from—Paris! He could only laugh out again wildly, as he looked at her.

"Jean!"—it was a quick, hurried exclamation, not all composure now, and her eyes were hidden, and her face was turned away. "Jean, good gracious, don't you hear father calling to you? Look, here he is!"

Jean swept his hand across his eyes. It was the madness upon him. Yes, here was Monsieur Bliss beside him, and she and her father were both talking at once. It was Paris! Always Paris that they talked of! In a week, in ten days, he would be there. And then they had both shaken hands with him, the grey eyes had smiled into his for an instant, and she had sprung from him into the automobile. It was a daze. They had gone. He was standing in the road watching them. She was fluttering a scarf at him, as she leaned far over the back of the car—her voice, full-throated, was throbbing in his ears.

"*Au revoir, Jean! Au revoir—till Paris!*"

The car disappeared over the brow of a little hill,

came into sight again as it topped the opposite rise, became a blur and then a tiny dot, scarcely discernible, far on along the road. And still he stood there.

It was gone at last. He turned then, and started back along the road toward Bernay-sur-Mer; now walking slowly, now suddenly changing his pace to a quick, impulsive stride. His eyes were on the road before him, but he saw nothing. Her voice was ringing in his ears again, and again he was living in that golden land of dreams — with her.

Paris! The City Beautiful! Paris — where he should know fame and power, where his genius should kindle a flame of enthusiasm that would spread throughout all France! Paris — where men should do him honour! Paris — where riches were! Paris — where she was!

His brain reeled with it. It was not wild imagining. A power, a mighty power, the power that made him master of his art lived and breathed in every fibre of his being. He needed no tongue of others now to tell him that this power was his; the knowledge of it was in his soul until he knew, knew as he knew that he had being and existence, that the work of Jean Laparde would stand magnificent and supreme before the eyes of the world. He saw himself the centre, the leader of a glittering entourage. Fame! Men of the highest ranks should envy him — the gamins of Paris should know his name. He threw back his head on his great shoulders. Conceit, all this? No; it was stupendous — but it was not conceit. He knew — his soul knew it. He was more sure of himself now than even those great critics of France had been sure. They had seen nothing — he had not begun. A year, two years in Paris, the tools to work with, the models of flesh and blood at his command — and, ah, God, what would he not do!

They should see, they should see then! And they should stand and wonder, as they had not wondered before — at Jean Laparde!

He laughed suddenly aloud. Father Anton had preached a sermon once in the little church, he remembered it now — that fame was an empty thing. An empty thing! He laughed again. It was the simplicity of the good curé, who believed such things because, *pardieu!* the curé was a gentle soul and knew no better. What should Father Anton, who never went anywhere, into whose life came nothing but the little daily affairs of the fisherfolk in Bernay-sur-Mer, who could never have had any experience in the things outside the life of the village that turned everlastingly like a wheel in its grooves, know of fame? It was not the fault of Father Anton that he talked so, for he got those things out of his books, and, having no reason out of his own knowledge of life to know any better, believed them!

Jean shrugged his shoulders. One felt sorry for Father Anton! Perhaps once in two years the curé journeyed as far as Marseilles — and the few miles was a great event! What could one expect Father Anton to discover for himself out of life?

Fame — an empty thing! Poor Father Anton, who, because he believed it, so earnestly preached it to Papa Fregeau and Pierre Lachance who never went even as far as Marseilles, and who therefore in turn were very content to believe it, too! An empty thing? It was *everything!*

He drew in his breath sharply; his hand was feverishly tossing back the hair from his forehead. It was everything! It was wealth, it was power, it was might, it was greatness. It was real; it brought things to the very senses one possessed, things that one could see and

hear and touch and taste and smell. They were real — real, those things! It brought money that bought all things; it brought position, honour and command, a name amongst the great names of France; it thrilled the soul and fired the blood; it was limitless, boundless, without horizon. It brought all things beyond the dreams that one could dream, the plaudits of his fellow-men, the wild-flung shouts of acclamation from hoarse-throated multitudes; it brought riches; it brought affluence; and it brought — love.

Love! Ay, it would bring love! It would bring him that more than it would bring him any other thing. He knew now what had held him back from crushing that maddeningly alluring form in his arms, from giving free rein to the passion that was his, from giving him the mastery of her. It was that same thing that Marie-Louise sensed between herself and what she called the *grand monde*. He, too, had not yet bridged the gulf. He had not yet been able to look into those grey eyes of the beautiful American and forget, deep in his soul, that she was different, that he had been Jean Laparde the poor fisherman and not always Jean Laparde the great sculptor. Was she playing with him? What did it matter? The day would come when she would not *play*! She would be his — and this fame, that was so empty a thing, would give her to him. If for no other thing than that he would go to Paris. She would be his — as all the world would be his! His! That is what fame would bring him! Would she play with him then in his greatness!

Paris! Paris! It lay before him, a glittering, entrancing vista; it held out its arms to him, and beckoned him; it heaped honour and glory and riches upon him; it gave him — her!

His hands were clenched at his sides, and the skin

over the knuckles, tight-drawn, showed white; his stride was rapid, fierce; he was breathing quickly; his face was flushed; his eyes were burning. Paris, his art that would bring him fame, the fame that would bring him her — nor heaven nor hell would hold him back!

And then suddenly in the middle of the road he stopped, and his hand tore at his collar as though it choked him. Subconsciously he had seen stretching out before him the sparkling blue of the quiet sea, the headland, the little strip of beach where he and Gaston used to keep the boats, a blur of white where the house on the bluff showed through the trees — he had come that far on his way back. Subconsciously, in a meaningless way, he had seen this; but now it was blotted from him in a flash, and in its place came a scene that, though imaginary, was vivid, real, actual, where before reality itself had meant nothing.

It was black, intensely black, and the wild howling of the wind was in his ears. The rain was lashing at his face, and all along the beach echoed the terrific boom and roar of the surf. And now there came the crash of thunder, and quick upon its heels the heavens opening in darting, zigzag tongue-flames, lurid, magnificent, awesome, as the lightning flashes leapt across the sky. And he was standing on that little strip of beach, and far out across the waters, shrouded in a white smother of spume and spray, the figure of Marie-Louise stood outlined on the edge of the Perigeau Reef. And now he was crossing that stretch between them, and living again the physical agony that had been his; and now he was in the water, clinging to the gunwale of the boat, and in all the wild abandon of the storm her lips and his were pressed together in that long kiss that seemed to span all life and all eternity.

As though spellbound, a whiteness creeping into his

face, Jean stood tense and motionless there in the road. Why had this come now — he had never let it come in the week that was past. Why should it have come now, like floodgates opened against his will, to overwhelm him? Ah, was it that? That little figure, that was just discernible, far off on that beach, the little figure, bare-footed, that was sitting now on the stem of his boat where it was drawn up on the sand, and whose face was cupped in her hands, and who seemed to be staring so intently out toward the Perigeau Reef! That was Marie-Louise there — Marie-Louise. Was it the sight of her that had brought this thing upon him?

And now the scene was changed again. And it was against the window panes that the rain lashed, and against the sashes that the wind tore, and the lamp threw its light on the grey-grim face of old Gaston Bernier on the bed.

Jean shivered a little. What was coming now? What was that? Gaston's hand was upon his. He could hear Gaston's voice: "Jean, do you love Marie-Louise?" And then Gaston was repeating the question, and repeating it again: "Jean, do you love Marie-Louise?" And the old rugged strength seemed back again in Gaston Bernier, as he rose up in bed, and his voice in a strange, stern note rang through the room: "Swear it, Jean . . . to a dying man and in God's presence . . . swear that you will . . ."

"God! My God!" Jean cried out aloud — and like a blind man feeling before him, turned from the road, stumbled a little way through the fields, and flung himself face down upon the grass.

There was torment and dismay upon him. His mind was in riot; his soul bare and naked now before him. Paris! No; he must go instead to Marie-Louise and tell her that he would stay in Bernay-sur-Mer, that

they would live their lives together, because they loved each other. Yes; he loved Marie-Louise, not with the mad passion he had for this American who bewitched him, but as he had loved her all the years since they were children. He had told Gaston that, and it was true. It was the act of a *misérable* to go away! No; he would not go now. It was true, all that he had told Marie-Louise, that she should stand on the beach and hold out her arms to him in welcome when he pulled ashore from the fishing, and that they would be always happy together. And yet — and yet had not Marie-Louise herself said that he belonged to France, and said herself that he must go for the great career that lay before him, for the great work that he was to do?

He cried out aloud sharply, as though in hurt — and prone upon his face, his hands outstretched before him, lay still for a little time.

It seemed to come insidiously, calling to him, luring him, wrestling, fighting, battling with the soul of him — Paris! Here there was love, but there, too, was love. One was calm; the other like the wild tumult of the storm that in its might, primal, elemental, swept him blindly forward. Paris — she would be there, she who held him in a spell, who made him forget Marie-Louise. And there was fame and glory there, honour and wealth — all, all, everything that the world could give. And it was his, all his — he had only to reach out and take it. There, all France would be at his feet. It made his brain swim with the mad intoxication of it. It was as a man dying with thirst who sees afar the water that is life to him. Here, he could never be contented now, he could never be happy, and in a year, two years, Marie-Louise, therefore, would be unhappy, too. But — but he could not go . . . that night that he had held Gaston Bernier's hand . . . and

there was Marie-Louise that he loved . . . Marie-Louise with the pure, fearless face, the great eyes that were full of a world of things, of calm, of trust, of tenderness and love, the lips, the wonderful lips that were so divinely carved, the lips like which there were no others. And he must choose now forever between Marie-Louise and — Paris. If he went, he would never come back. He was honest with himself now. He knew that. Marie-Louise knew that. He must choose now. Choose! Had he not already decided that he would — that he would — *what?*

It began all over again, and after that again for a hundred times, until the brain of the man was sick and weary, and the torment of it had brought the moisture to his forehead and into his eyes a fevered, hunted look — and still he lay there, and the hours went by. And after a time, beneath the rim of the sea in the west, the sun sank down, and the golden afterglow, soft and rich and warm, was as a gentle, parting benediction upon the earth — and Jean's head was buried in his outflung arms. And twilight came — and after that the evening — then darkness, and the myriad, twinkling stars of a night, calm and serene, were overhead — and it grew late.

And there came a soul-wrung cry from Jean, as he lifted a worn and haggard face to the moonlight.

“What shall I do? What shall I do?”

BOOK II: TWO YEARS LATER

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— I —

THE DUPLICITY OF FATHER ANTON

IT was early evening in Paris; an evening in winter — and cold. Father Anton drew his chair quite close to the little stove that, not without some prickings of conscience at his prodigality, he had fed lavishly with coals from the half empty scuttle beside it; and, leaning forward, alternately extended his palms to the heat and rubbed them vigorously together. The room, or rather the two small rooms, that comprised his lodgings in one of the poorest neighbourhoods of the city, were, since the windows were tightly closed and the sides of the stove a dull red, stifling hot; but Father Anton was not a young man, and the winter of Paris was not the balmy winter of his beloved South.

He took off his spectacles, polished them abstractedly on the sleeve of his *soutane*, replaced them, and picked up a book. He opened the book, turned a few pages without looking at them, and with a little sigh laid the book upon his knees. It was only in strict privacy that he permitted himself an indulgence in regrets and the somewhat doubtful solace of retrospection. And now he opened the stove door. It always seemed that in the glowing coals and the little spurts of flames one could picture so much more clearly the blue of the Medi-

terranean, the sunny skies, the clean white cottages of Bernay-sur-Mer, the boats dotting the sea and beach, and Papa Fregeau standing in the doorway of the Bas Rhône, and Pierre Lachance trudging along the street with a great pile of nets slung over his shoulders.

Father Anton shook his head slowly. It was very strange, the workings of Providence. He had always thought to die in Bernay-sur-Mer. And now already he had been in Paris a year! But the sacrifice was very little, it mattered nothing at all, and if he had longings and dreams of the days that were gone, he was still very happy here and should be thankful to God for the wonderful work that had been given him to do; only he remembered his dismay that morning, when, unannounced, the bishop had come to Bernay-sur-Mer and had told him word had been received from Paris that Monsieur Bliss, the millionaire American, would give the enormous sum of five hundred thousand francs a year to be distributed amongst the poor of Paris on the condition that he, Father Anton, would undertake its distribution. And he remembered how the bishop had explained that it had been suggested to Monsieur Bliss that perhaps he, Father Anton, would not care to leave Bernay-sur-Mer and his people there, and that there were others, younger men, nearer at hand, who, under the guidance and direction of the ecclesiastical authorities, would willingly and gladly undertake the work. And, above all else, he remembered what monsignor had told him had been the reply of Monsieur Bliss: "No; it isn't because Father Anton is a clergyman that I want him, it's because he's the man I've been looking for," that most astounding American had said. "There isn't any creed, or religion, or sect, or anything like that in this — or any supervision. What I'm after is practical results, and nothing else. I just want a piece of

bread to go where it is needed, and no questions asked. I've always had the idea, but I didn't have the man. I've got him now. Father Anton might not care to leave Bernay-sur-Mer — eh? H'm! There's five hundred thousand francs a year at his disposal for the poor of Paris — ask him if he thinks he can do any good with it? ”

And so he had come to Paris. It was magnificent that — the generosity of Monsieur Bliss! And Monsieur Bliss was amazing! He had found a most beautiful little apartment, most beautifully furnished, in a very fashionable part of the city, and with two servants already installed, awaiting him. Imagine! It was impossible! How could one reach the poor unless one lived amongst them? And to maintain an establishment when — Father Anton sighed again — when even the enormous sum of five hundred thousand francs was all too little!

He glanced around the room. Even as it was, his quarters must seem ostentatious compared with the poverty about him — the Widow Migneault, for example, in the rear room of the *troisième étage* above him. But what could one do? There was no arguing with those Americans! They had insisted on furnishing the place to their own satisfaction.

Father Anton's eyes returned to the glowing coals in the stove. He was very happy because his work was the work that he, too, had dreamed of; but one could not help thinking sometimes of Bernay-sur-Mer, and all the lifelong friends, and the people who were so close to his heart. And if he loved to picture them in his mind, and if there was perhaps a little ache at the thought that he had left them, he was none the less thankful to the *bon Dieu* that he could do so much now with what was left of his life.

What were they all doing in Bernay-sur-Mer to-night? What was Marie-Louise doing? It was two months now since she had written him. She did not write as often as she used to write. He shook his head sadly. She had had her sorrow, poor Marie-Louise! What a boundless store of love there was in that brave little heart! If only it would be given to some worthy young fellow now — Father Anton wrinkled his brows in deep thought, as though he would decide the matter on the spot — say, Amidé Dubois, who was a fine, honest lad; they would both be very happy, and Marie-Louise would forget the sooner. Yes, certainly, Amidé Dubois would do admirably.

A clatter of hoofs, the rattle of wheels over the cobble stones on the street, and the sudden cessation of both in front of the house, broke in on the curé's musings. He rose slowly from his chair, and, going to the window, peered out. His curiosity was rewarded only to the extent of seeing a fiacre driving away again. It was rather strange, that! Fiacres were not in the habit of stopping before any house in that section of Paris. It would be some one for him then undoubtedly. Monsieur Bliss, perhaps. No; not Monsieur Bliss, for was there not the grand reception to-night that the Société des Beaux-Arts was tendering to Jean Laparde, and for which Monsieur Bliss had sent him a card, but to which he was not going. It was to be a great affair at which the President of the Republic was to be present, and a rusty *soutane* would be not a little out of place there — and besides, the Jean of Bernay-sur-Mer and the Jean of Paris were not the same. Perhaps one should not let such thoughts come — but it was true.

Father Anton listened. Yes; he had been right. Some one was knocking at the door now.

“Yes — come!” he called, and hurried hospitably

across the room, as the door opened — and stopped in stunned amazement — and ran forward again, holding out his arms. “ Marie-Louise ! ” he cried.

Half laughing, half crying, she was in his arms; her own around his neck.

“ Oh, Father Anton! Dear, dear Father Anton! ” she was repeating over and over again.

“ Well, well — but, but — well, well,” was all he could say — and kissed her, and pressed her face against his shoulder, and patted her head.

And then he held her off to look at her. It was the same Marie-Louise, with the same bright eyes, even if they were glistening now with tears; the same Marie-Louise, just as though this was Bernay-sur-Mer and not Paris at all, for there was no hat to hide the great black tresses of hair, and there was just the same simple style of loose blouse and ankle skirt that she always wore in the little village, and it might well have been that he and she were there again, there in Bernay-sur-Mer — only on the floor, where she had dropped it as she ran to meet him, was a neatly tied-up little bundle that spoke of the long journey.

“ Well, well! ” he ejaculated helplessly again, and closed the door, and drew her to a chair and sat down, while she knelt affectionately on the floor at his knees.

“ Oh! ” she said excitedly. “ I did not think Paris could be so big a place. And there was such a crowd in the station, and such a crowd outside, and so many streets, and all the people I spoke to only shook their heads when I asked for Father Anton, and — and then I began to be a little frightened. And then — what do you think? Imagine! Was I not grand? For a franc-fifty a *cocher* said he would drive me to the address, and — *me voici!* Did I not do well? ”

“ Splendidly! ” he agreed approvingly. “ But,

Marie-Louise, I do not understand. It is a great surprise. You did not write; you said nothing about coming to Paris. Why did you not tell me you were coming?"

She looked up at him merrily.

"Must I answer that — quite truthfully?"

"Of course!" he said, smiling indulgently.

"Well, then," she said demurely, "I was afraid you would say I should not come — and now that I am here you cannot say it."

"Ah," he exclaimed, with mock severity, "that is a serious confession you are making, Marie-Louise! So! And you thought I would not approve, eh? What then has happened in Bernay-sur-Mer?"

"Nothing has happened," she answered — but now she looked away from him as she spoke. "I have sold my house there."

"Nothing! Sold your house?" Father Anton began to take alarm. He took Marie-Louise's face between his hands and forced her to look at him. Yes, yes, the gaiety, the lightness of spirit was only make-believe; the tears were more genuine than the smile that came tremulously to her lips. "Marie-Louise," he said anxiously, "what is it?"

"Nothing!" she said again. "Only — only I could not stay there any longer" — and suddenly, in a flood of tears, she buried her face on the old priest's knees.

"But, Marie-Louise — Marie-Louise!" he protested in helpless dismay — and laid his hand soothingly on the bowed head.

She looked up in an instant, dashing the tears away angrily.

"I am a baby!" she cried, trying to laugh. "It was the journey, and the new things, and seeing you again

—but it is over now.” Then, a little hesitantly: “Tell me of Jean.”

“Jean?” repeated Father Anton, startled. “Jean?” He looked at her closely. Could it be that? And then, with a little gasp, as he seemed to read the truth in her eyes: “It—it is Jean then, Marie-Louise, who has brought you to Paris?”

“Yes,” she answered, in a low voice.

The curé’s face grew very grave.

“You have heard from him?”

She shook her head.

“I have never heard from Jean since the day he left Bernay-sur-Mer”—she was plucking with her fingers at the skirt of the priest’s *soutane*.

There was a long silence, broken at last by the old priest’s deep sigh.

“You still love Jean, my child?” he asked gently.

“I have always loved him,” she said simply.

Father Anton fumbled with his spectacles. His heart had grown very heavy. It seemed that the cruellest, saddest thing in the world had happened.

“Tell me about him!” she demanded eagerly. “You see him every day, father.”

“I have not seen Jean in many months,” he replied sadly.

“Not seen him!” she echoed in consternation.

“But he is here—in Paris—isn’t he?”

“Yes; he is here,” the curé said slowly. “But Paris is a big place, and—and even old friends sometimes do not meet often.”

“But tell me about him!” she persisted. “He has become a great man—a very great, great man?”

“Yes,” said Father Anton gravely, “he has become a great man—the greatest perhaps in all of France.” Then suddenly, laying his hands on Marie-Louise’s

shoulders: "Marie-Louise, what is in your heart? Why have you come here?"

"But I have told you, and you know," she said. "To see Jean."

The curé's hands tightened upon her shoulders. What was he to say to her? How was he to tell her of the danger she in her innocence would never guess, that lay so cold and ominous a thing upon his own heart? How was he to put into words his fear of Jean for this pure soul that was at his knees? As wide as the world was the distance that lay now between Marie-Louise and Jean — but it was not that, not even that Jean was openly attentive to Myrna Bliss — that was only a little thing. Jean was not the Jean of Bernay-sur-Mer. The man was glugged now with power and wealth. And swaying him was not the love of art that might have lifted him to a loftier plane, it was the prostitution of that divine, God-given genius for the lust of fame. And for fame he had exchanged his soul. What was there sacred to Jean now? It was a life closely approximating that of a roué that Jean lived. And for Marie-Louise, with her love a weapon that might so easily be turned against her, to come in touch with — no, no; it was not to be thought of!

"Marie-Louise," he said hoarsely, "you must go back. You do not understand. Jean is very different now — he is not the Jean —"

"I know," she interposed, with a catch in her voice. "I know — better than you think I know. It is you who do not understand. He is of the *grand monde*, I understand that; and I — I am what I am, and it must be always so. But I love him, father. Is it wrong that I should love him? I will never speak to him, and he shall never know that I am here; but I must see him,

and see his work, and — and — oh, don't you understand? ”

“ And after that? ” asked the old priest sorrowfully.

“ What does it matter — after that? ” she said tensely. “ I do not know.”

“ No, Marie-Louise,” he said earnestly, “ no, my child, no good can come of it. You must go back to Bernay-sur-Mer.”

She drew away from him, staring at him a little wildly.

“ But do you not understand? ” she cried out with a sudden rush of passion. “ But do you not understand that it is stronger than I — that I could not stay in Bernay-sur-Mer because I was always thinking, thinking — that I could not go back there now any more than I could stay there before? I must do this! I will do it! Nothing shall stop me! And if you will not help me, then —”

Father Anton drew her gently back against his knees. Yes; he was beginning to understand — that the problem was not to be settled so easily as by the mere expedient of telling Marie-Louise she must go back to Bernay-sur-Mer. Those small clenched hands, those tight lips were eloquent of finality. It became simply a matter of accepting a fact. He might insist a dozen times that she should go. It would be useless. She would not go! The old priest's brows furrowed in anxiety. This love for Jean was still first in the girl's heart. Words, arguments, were of no avail against the longing that was supreme with her, that had brought her on the long journey across all France. But her love was the love that pictured the frank, strong, simple fisherman of Bernay-sur-Mer. If she should see Jean as he really was! If she should see for herself the

change in him, the abandon of his life; and, too, see the glittering circles in which he moved! The first would dispel her love for him; the second would show her in any case the utter futility of it. As long as she held this love, that he had hoped and prayed she had forgotten, it spoiled her life. It could only bring her misery, unhappiness and sorrow. It would hurt cruelly, this disenchantment; but it would save her, this poor child, whom he loved as he would have loved a daughter of his own. Yes; if she should see Jean as he really was, see him intimately enough to realise the truth of the life he was leading! But how could that be brought about — and at the same time protect her and keep her *safe*?

She rose slowly to her feet, and stood before him, her hands still tightly shut at her sides.

“I was so sure, so sure that you would help me!” she said miserably. And then, in pleading abandon, she flung out her arms to him. “Oh, won’t you, Father Anton, won’t you? Won’t you try to understand? It can do no harm, only — only it is all my life — just to see him, to be near him for a little while, to know that it has all been a wonderful thing for him — and he will never know, I will not let him know.”

The curé’s hands clasped and unclasped nervously.

“Would you promise that, Marie-Louise? That you would not speak to him, that you would not let him know you were here in Paris?”

She answered him almost passionately, in hurt pride.

“Oh, how little you understand!” she cried. “Do you think that my love is like that? Do you think that for anything in the world I would force myself into his life? Do you think that is why I came? Yes; I will promise that!”

“Well, well,” said Father Anton soothingly, “we

will see. But first — eh? — a little supper? You are tired, my little Marie-Louise, and hungry after the long journey. Come now, you will help me! We will make a little omelette, and boil the coffee, and pretend that we are in Bernay-sur-Mer — eh? ”

He began to bustle around the room, setting out bread and cheese from the cupboard, and putting the coffee-pot upon the stove — and presently they sat down to the simple meal.

Marie-Louise ate very little; and finally, when she pushed her plate away, the tears were in her eyes again.

“ I cannot eat any more,” she said. “ I — oh, Father Anton, you said that you would see. You meant that — that you *would* help me, didn’t you? ”

It was plain, it was very plain that nothing would distract her for a moment! Father Anton sighed again, and got up from his chair, and began to pace the room. He had been turning a plan over and over in his mind while he had watched her so anxiously during the meal. It was strange how readily it had come to him, that plan! A monitor within whispered the suggestion that perhaps it had come readily because it was deception! The curé passed his hand in a troubled way back and forth through his white hair. He had seen little of Jean — it was perhaps because he reminded Jean of Bernay-sur-Mer and the past that Jean was anxious to forget, that Jean had gradually come, in manner more than words, to intimate that the old friendship was distasteful. But if latterly he had seen little of Jean, at least when he had first come to Paris his visits to the studio had been frequent enough to enable him to form an intimate acquaintance with Hector, the red-haired concierge of Jean’s studio and apartment, and with madame, Hector’s wife. Nor had he permitted this intimacy to wane. He could not for-

get that he had loved Jean, and through these good people he still kept his interest alive. It was but a few days ago that Hector had complained that the work was too much for his wife alone, that after some nights at the studio with a gay company the morning presented a debacle to clear up that was a day's work in itself. It was too much for her; and they came often, those nights.

Father Anton glanced at Marie-Louise. She was still watching him, a sort of pitiful, eager expectancy in her face. His eyes fell to the floor, as he continued to pace up and down. It could be arranged. Jean rose very late. Marie-Louise could go early in the mornings to tidy up the studio and the *atelier*. He could tell Hector she was a charge of his, an honest girl to be trusted, who would do the work for a few francs; and Hector in turn could obtain Jean's consent. Marie-Louise would see for herself the life Jean led — and, besides, Hector and his wife were not tongue-tied! But it was a terribly cruel thing to do! The old priest's hands clasped and unclasped again in genuine distress. It was terribly cruel! But it was little Marie-Louise, whom he loved so tenderly, whose future was at stake. It must not always be as it was to-day — sadness and hopelessness for the brave young heart that should be so full of joy and life.

He halted before Marie-Louise. Yes, it was the right thing to do; there was no other way; she must be disillusioned; she should see Jean's life at the studio; and to-night at the great reception she should see Jean himself. Only his heart was very heavy — it was so hard a thing to do.

"Listen, Marie-Louise," he said abruptly. "I will help you, but it is on the condition to which you have agreed — that Jean is in no way to know that you are

here. I will arrange with his concierge that very early in the mornings, before Jean is up and when nobody is there, you shall have the care of his studio and *atelier*, so you will be able to see all you want to of his work; and to the concierge you are simply a charge of mine who is in need of the few francs you will earn."

"Oh, Father Anton, how good you are!"—she had jumped up joyfully from her chair, and was in his arms again. "But I do not want the money. I have plenty — from my house, you know."

"But if you took no money, they would not understand why you would work," explained Father Anton hurriedly. The depth of his duplicity was very great! The gentle soul of Father Anton was conscience stricken at her gratitude, her innocence. If he had not gone so far he would retreat. She was crying in his arms. Never before had he known what it was not to be able to look another in the eyes. He was glad that Marie-Louise's head was hidden on his shoulder for he could not have looked at her. Father Anton felt himself a criminal. It was not a rôle that lay lightly upon him.

"And Jean himself," she whispered. "When shall I see Jean?"

Father Anton coughed nervously.

"There — there is a reception to-night," he said hesitantly. He coughed again. "For Jean. You might see him there perhaps — from the gallery. I — I have a card."

She sprang away from him, with a quick exclamation of excitement.

"Oh, come then!" she cried impulsively, and caught his hand to pull him toward the door.

Father Anton turned away his head. Tears had sprung to his eyes. He was indeed a criminal — the criminal of the ages! But if it would save Marie-

Louise! Ah, yes, he must keep that thought always before him. He looked at her again, as he fumbled once more with his spectacles.

"Yes, yes; at once!" he said mechanically. "But" — he was staring at her now in sudden consternation — "but you cannot go like that! Have you no other clothes?"

She pointed at the little bundle on the floor.

He shook his head.

"No hat? No coat?"

"No-o," she said tremulously, as though she sensed an impending tragedy.

"But this is not Bernay-sur-Mer, Marie-Louise!" he said, in concern. "You cannot go about dressed like that in Paris; and, besides, you would freeze, my child."

She looked at him in silence — a sort of pitiful despair, mingling bitter disappointment and helpless dependence, in her eyes, in the expression of her face.

"Tut, tut!" murmured Father Anton, pulling at his under lip. And then quickly: "But wait — wait! We shall see!" And he ran into the other room.

There were always clothes there — for his poor. The rich people, the friends of Monsieur and Mademoiselle Bliss were always sending him their old things for distribution amongst his poor. Mademoiselle Bliss had sent him a package that afternoon. He remembered that there was a long cloak and a hat amongst the other things. Ah, yes; here they were! He held them up to look at them in the light from the doorway of the connecting rooms. They had strange notions about "old things," the rich! These, for example — he turned them about in the light — were as good as new. They bought clothes one day, the rich, wore them the afternoon, and gave them to him the

next morning — because overnight there had been created a new style! Father Anton smiled at his little conceit. But it was almost literally true. He had seen Myrna Bliss wearing these very things only a few days ago — the same black velvet cloak, and the same black velvet turban with the little white cockade. At least, he supposed it was a cockade! Ah, well — he shrugged his shoulders — his poor were the gainers!

“Here, Marie-Louise!” he called out, returning into the front room. “You may have these, child.”

“Oh!” she exclaimed, as she took them. Her eyes widened. “Oh — they are pretty! But — but, Father Anton, where did you get them? They are new.”

“No, not quite,” he smiled; “but new enough, I think, to last you all the winter. They were” — he stopped suddenly, in gentle tactfulness. Marie-Louise knew Myrna Bliss — it might cause her diffidence if she were aware that the cloak and hat had been made-moiselle’s. “They were sent to me by the rich people amongst many other things,” he amended, “to be distributed where” — he smiled again — “where I think they will do most good. So now they are yours. Put them on, and we will go.”

“Oh, Father Anton!” she cried again, in wonder at the sudden luxury that was hers — and slipped on the cloak; and ran to the curé’s shaving glass, which was the only semblance of a mirror in evidence, to set the turban daintily upon her head. “Dear, dear Father Anton — how good you are!”

But Father Anton did not answer. He was brushing his threadbare black overcoat — and making a very poor business of it. There was a great lump in his throat that refused to go either up or down — and he brushed continuously at one sleeve, because that was all

he could see through the sudden mist that had come before his eyes. And then, as he caught her gazing at him, he put on the coat hurriedly.

"Yes, yes," he said hastily. "But we are all ready, are we not — eh? Come then, Marie-Louise, we will go."

And presently they were on the street — and somehow to Father Anton the crisp cold of the night was very grateful, preferable for once to the soft warmth of his far-away South, since the hot flushes now kept coming and burning in his cheeks, as he walked abstractedly along. And they were silent for a little while, until a pressure of her fingers on his arm aroused him, and he turned his head to look at her. Her cheeks, too, he could see even in the murky light from the street lamps, were flushed, and the dark eyes were very bright.

"Couldn't — couldn't we hurry a little, Monsieur le Curé?" she suggested timidly.

"Hurry? Ah — you are cold!" he said contritely, and quickened his step.

"No," she answered. "I — it is only that it might be over — that we might be too late."

The words brought an added twinge to the already sore and overburdened soul of Father Anton. It was the heart of Marie-Louise that spoke, the heart that had no room but only for Jean. Ah, yes; but did he not understand that already! Had she not come across all France for Jean? But that was not all! How ignorant of this great world-city, its life, its customs, its fineness, its sordidness her words proclaimed her to be — how dependent they proclaimed her to be! But did he not know that too? How great indeed had been his own bewilderment, and confusion, and dismay when he had first come to Paris a year ago — even he who was accustomed to journeying, for had he not gone al-



"HERE, MARIE-LOUISE!" HE CALLED OUT, RETURNING TO THE ROOM,
"YOU MAY HAVE THESE, CHILD"

most once a year from Bernay-sur-Mer to Marseilles? How well he remembered it — but, tut, tut — of what avail was that? This was a vastly different matter, a very serious matter. Marie-Louise was a woman, so young, so beautiful, and in her ignorance, in her ingenuousness which was so marked a trait because she was so purely innocent, she — ah! — he found himself asking the *bon Dieu* to watch very carefully over Marie-Louise; and, very earnestly, with sad misgivings, as a corollary to that prayer, to forgive him if he were doing wrong in betraying the very innocence, the trust and simple confidence for which he asked protection for her from others.

“Father Anton, will — will we be late?” she ventured, evidently alarmed into the belief, since he had not replied, that so dire a misfortune was even more than a possibility.

And then he answered her very gravely.

“No, Marie-Louise. You need have no fear. It will only have begun; and even if it were midnight we should still be in time. Affairs like this are for all the evening, you see. Indeed, before going there, now that I come to think of it, perhaps we had better see about finding lodgings for you first. I know several very estimable families in this neighbourhood who would be glad to give you a room for a small sum, and you would be quite close to me, and —”

“But could we not do that afterwards?” she interposed quickly.

“Why, yes, of course, afterwards — if we do not stay too long at the reception,” Father Anton acquiesced. “You would rather do that, Marie-Louise?”

“Yes!” she said — and the word came tensely — and she pulled impulsively upon his arm.

And so then they hurried along, and after a little time the streets grew brighter, better lighted, and from streets became great boulevards, and from an occasional passer-by they were in the midst of many people where one must needs elbow one's way to get along; but Marie-Louise, save in a subconscious way that brought no concrete sense of meaning, saw none of this — she saw only Jean again, the sturdy, rugged figure that seemed to stand so clearly outlined now before her, so real, so actual, so living, as he had been that night when he had borne Gaston up the path in his strong arms; and the roar of the traffic upon the streets was as the roar of that mighty storm and the thunder of the sea breaking so pitilessly, so unceasingly upon the rocks. And Father Anton spoke to her, pointing to this and that as they went along — but she did not hear the curé. She was listening only to another voice. "In just a little minute I shall see Jean . . . I shall see Jean . . . I shall see Jean," her soul said. "I shall see Jean."

And then she was standing before a great building, and the building was ablaze with lights, and carriage after carriage, automobile after automobile was drawing up before a strange sort of canopy where even the street itself was laid with crimson carpet, and out of the carriages and the cars poured a constant stream of wonderfully dressed, fur-clad women and their escorts. And suddenly she drew back with a start. What had she done? She had stepped upon the soft carpet and in under the canopy — and a man bewilderingly covered with gold lace, who could be no less than a Marshal of France, though he seemed so effusive and polite as he opened the carriage doors to welcome each new arrival, was fixing her sternly with his eyes.

"Come, Marie-Louise," prompted Father Anton.

She felt the blood leave her face, and she drew very

close to Father Anton, clinging tightly to his arm. How fast her breath came! There was laughter, merriment around her; they pressed against her, they touched her, these wonderfully dressed people. How soft the carpet was! How one's feet sank into it! It was a sacrilege that she should walk upon it! How that constant murmur of voices rose and fell, rose and fell! What were they saying? It seemed that she should know! What was it? Yes, yes! "Jean Laparde . . . Jean Laparde . . . Jean Laparde." From in front, from behind her, on either side, on every tongue was the name of Jean Laparde. And it thrilled her, and her soul in a clarion echo caught up the refrain. "Jean Laparde . . . Jean Laparde . . . Jean Laparde!" And it seemed as though a thousand emotions surging upon her were welded together and massed and made into one, and that one was comparable to none she had ever known before because it was too great, and overpowering, and bewildering to understand. Only now she could lift up her head, and the blood was rushing proudly to her cheeks again.

And now they were in a great marble vestibule, and Father Anton was handing a card to an attendant, and speaking to the man.

"But Monsieur le Curé has full *entrée* — to the floor," the man replied.

She did not catch Father Anton's answer — but the attendant was bowing and speaking again.

"But certainly, monsieur — as Monsieur le Curé desires. To the right, monsieur."

And then there were stairs, beautiful wide marble stairs, and the press of people was left behind, for there seemed to be but few who climbed the stairs; and then — and then — she was in a balcony, and below her — ah, she could not see — it was all blurred before her

— and there seemed a great fear upon her, for her heart pounded so hard and so fiercely. And then, strangely, as a mist rises from the sea, it began to clear away, that blur from before her eyes, and myriad lights from a massive chandelier, that was suspended from a great dome overhead, played on the bare, flashing shoulders of women on the floor below her, played on the jewels that adorned coiffures and necks, played on glittering uniforms, on a scene magnificent and splendid — and focused, as her eyes fixed and held, on that one outstanding figure, the figure that was like to the figure of a demi-god, the only figure, the only one that she saw now in all that vast assemblage, who stood erect, strong and massive-shouldered, the black hair, a little longer now, flung in careless abandon back from the broad, white forehead. It was Jean! It was Jean!

“Jean!” she whispered — and her hand stole into Father Anton’s. “Jean!”

And he was not changed — only that short, pointed beard, that seemed to add a something, that made him more imposing. It was Jean, the same Jean — only there was a grace, an ease, a command, a kingship in his poise as he stood there, and — yes — yes — they came — one after the other — the men, the women — and bowed before him.

“Do you remember Monsieur and Mademoiselle Bliss?” Father Anton said gently. “See — they are there beside Jean. And that tall man to whom they are talking is a very famous statesman for one so young. His name is Paul Valmain.”

They did not interest her. There was only Jean. And she could not look long enough at him. There was music playing somewhere, softly, very softly, scarcely audible above the sound of so many voices all

talking at once, voices that ascended in a subdued roar like the sound of a shell that one held to one's ear. She tried to think, and she could not. Afterwards she would think. Now she could only look.

Father Anton touched her arm. Was it already time to go? No, no — not yet! Not yet — for a little while! She had come so far, so long a way just for this — to see Jean.

"It is the President of the Republic coming, Marie-Louise — see! Listen!"

There was tumult about her. Those in the gallery around her were clapping their hands, waving their handkerchiefs; and the music she had heard playing so softly crashed suddenly into the strains of that song of glory, immortal, undying, that was cradled in the very soul of France itself — the Marseillaise. And as it fired the blood, that melody, martial, stirring, that men had died for, ay, and women, too, the outburst around her rose to hysterical heat, and thunders of applause rolled and reverberated through the room that was bigger than any room she had ever seen or dreamed of. And they were calling Jean's name again — and the President, the great President was there with Jean.

"Jean Laparde! Jean Laparde! *Vive Jean Laparde!*"

She could not see any more. Her eyes were blinded with tears now, and they were proud tears, and they were glad tears, and they were wondering tears that she could not comprehend herself. Jean's beacon! Had the *bon Dieu* permitted her to be that in a little way, given it to her to have helped just a little, to have had just a little share in bringing Jean to this great moment, this wonderful triumph? Jean's beacon! How vividly that scene of the years ago came back, when she had told Jean he did not belong to her — and re-

living that scene, here in the presence of its great fulfilment, she spoke aloud unconsciously.

“It is true! He does not belong to me. He belongs to France!”

And Father Anton, because he did not understand, because it seemed that the disillusionment must have been so much more complete and so much more cruel and hard to bear than he had feared it would be, and because her renunciation was accepted so bravely, turned away his head and did not answer.

And Marie-Louise's fingers closed in a tense, involuntary pressure over Father Anton's hand — and she spoke again.

“He belongs to France!”

And then, after another moment:

“Take me — back now — Father Anton, please.”

MYRNA BLISS tapped petulantly with the toe of her small shoe on the floor of the limousine, glanced at the diamond-encircled bracelet watch on her wrist, remarked more or less abstractedly that it was a minute or so after five o'clock, and stared through the plate glass windows at the backs of her liveried chauffeur and footman. The reception of the night before had, so far as she was concerned, been marked by two incidents, which, at the present moment, were very fully occupying her thoughts.

It had required all her tact and ingenuity to avert a declaration from Paul Valmain, which would have been a disaster, because any declaration was a disaster until that moment arrived when one reached the point where one began to fear that horrible word "passée" and it became necessary to accept the inevitable — and marry. A declaration, as any one could see, whether it was accepted or refused, had its consequences — one's proprietorship in a man became either restricted to that one man alone, which in turn was very like locking one's self in a cage and handing over the key; or it was lost altogether. And Paul Valmain was almost as much run after by her set as Jean Laparde! Fancy! Only thirty, a bachelor — and already the leader of his political party! Yes, decidedly, besides being amazingly handsome and amazingly brilliant, Paul was a figure in France!

The man was passionately, madly in love with her; and so was Jean — which went without saying! Imagine! The two lions of social Paris! Nothing, not an affair, was complete without them — and she had only to lift a finger as to two slaves! Therefore social Paris was utterly and completely under her domination. She, literally, was Paris. It was very plain! So long as she exercised a proprietorship over both of them, Paris was at her feet. It was not a question of choice between them — not at all. Jean was *the* lion, so much so that she could even hold court with Jean alone; but with both, her position was impregnable. The trouble was — her brows puckered into anxious little furrows — that at the first opportunity Paul would renew the attack. It was very nice to have Paris at one's feet, but it was quite another matter to keep it there. Paul, of course, was the more difficult of the two to keep in hand. Jean, because he had never seemed to shake off entirely that diffidence toward her born of Bernay-sur-Mer, she had so far been able to manage quite simply, only — her eyes shifted from the chauffeur's back to the toe of her shoe, and her foot ceased its petulant tapping on the floor — that was the other incident of last night.

It had happened just after the arrival of the President. Jean had sought her out. She remembered the heightened colour in his cheeks, the sort of nervous brilliance in his eyes. He had been drunk — drunk with the wealth, the glamour, the power that was his; intoxicated with the fame, the adulation, the triumph of the moment. He was a glutton for that — for fame. There was very little else that mattered to Jean. He was the supreme type of egoist. She could dissect Jean very coolly and with precision, she thought.

“The studio, to-morrow afternoon at five, Myrna

—don't fail," he had said — and had passed on.

There had been a certain air of authority in his tones — to which she had promptly taken exception, and to which, in an annoying and persistent way, she still took exception. Furthermore, it conveyed a possible, and alarming hint that his docility perhaps was wearing thin. Well, that would never do at all! She was going, of course, to the studio now — but she would take care of Jean! Five o'clock, he had said. She would be a little late — as she intended to be. At half past five she had asked Paul Valmain and a choice circle of the younger set to drop in at 26 Rue Vanitaire, as a graceful little courtesy, so to speak, to congratulate Jean on his triumph of the night before! The grey eyes held a smile in which mockery and merriment were mingled. One's defences should always be in order!

The small shoe began to tap on the floor of the car again. What a short time — what a long time those two years had been since sleepy, anæsthetised Bernay-sur-Mer! Jean had attracted her then because he had been a "new" sensation — and he had attracted her ever since because he continued to be "the" sensation. But attraction and love were quite different, were they not? Success after success, triumph after triumph had been his. It had been astounding, stupefying, magnificent! At first it had been the inner circle of devotees of art, such as those who had gone to Bernay-sur-Mer, who had hailed him; then, in furious and bewildering sequence, Paris, then France, then Europe — and, equally, so her letters told her, he was the rage in America. None made comparisons — there were no comparisons to make. The man towered, stood alone, without rival, as the greatest sculptor of the age. And,

in a sense, he had not begun. Men like old Bidelot and her father said that, stupendous as it already was, his genius had not yet attained its full development; that, marvellous as was the power, force and realism of his conceptions, the exquisite beauty of his execution, there still remained an intangible something yet to be achieved.

Myrna shrugged her pretty shoulders.

"Ah, just that *tout petit chose!*" old Bidelot called it. "So fleeting, so evanescent, so — so —" and he would wave his arms like a grand opera conductor. "Soul," her father called it, in his turn. "The boy hasn't lived enough yet. He'll get it, and then — well, there's only one word to describe it — immortal!"

Myrna made a wry grimace. What was the use of all that? What did they want? And what rubbish! A man whose work was incomparable, that all the world was going crazy over! And what, after all, did old Bidelot and her father know about it, anyway? Old Bidelot, for example, couldn't make a piece of clay resemble a doughnut, except for the hole, if he tried for a thousand years. And as for her father — Myrna choked a laugh.

She glanced at her watch again — and then, quickly, out of the window. It was ten minutes past five, and the car was slowing up in front of the studio. In twenty minutes the others would be here — she had told *them* to be prompt. Some day, it was very possible, she might marry Jean — but not yet. She was far too well contented with her life as it was! She had managed Jean and his tentative outbursts — for his docility, as she dubbed it, had not been mere tameness — with perfect success for two years; and now, if, as she was somewhat inclined to surmise, his actions

of last evening presaged another, she was quite capable of managing that — for twenty minutes.

She alighted from the car, and, instructing her chauffeur that he need not wait, ran up the steps of the sort of stoop that was over the concierge's door and apartment beneath. Hector's red head and doll's-blue eyes, for once, a little to her surprise, were not in evidence on the arrival of a car. The front door, however, was not locked. She pushed it open, entered the hallway, crossed to the door of the salon, and knocked. There was no answer. There was, however, nothing strange about that — Jean, probably, was in the studio proper, the *atelier* beyond. Well, she would surprise him!

She opened the salon door softly, closed it softly, stepped into the centre of the large, magnificently appointed room, whose decorations and remodelling she and her father had planned; and, calmly unbuttoning her long glove, stood looking around her. And then her fingers held quite rigidly on a glove button. She had not seen him as she had entered! Jean was rising from a divan behind her, near the door. Her arm still extended, the other hand still on the glove button, she turned her head and shoulders like a statue on a pivot, to watch him in amazement. Without a word, he had stepped swiftly to the door, locked it — and now he was putting the key in his pocket.

“Jean, what are you doing?” she exclaimed sharply.

He laughed a little — in a low way. It was the first sound he had made. She stared at him, a thrill upon her that she could not quite define — it was not fear; it was more an uncomfortable disquiet, in which surprise and bewilderment were dominant. But now, as he faced her, she noticed that the same high colour was in his cheeks, the same nervous brilliancy was in his eyes as had been there the night before — and he was

not even dressed, he who was so punctilious in the late afternoons in that regard. It was as though he might have but thrown aside his big sculptor's over-dress, for he was in loose white shirt with flowing tie, and belted trousers. Usually she liked him like that; it seemed to accentuate, bring out, unfetter the splendid physique of the man; but now — she shrugged her shoulders with well-affected composure. Myrna Bliss was too self-poised to be swept from her feet by any situation. Jean was acting very strangely! What was the matter with him? She stripped off her gloves coolly, and tossed her outer wraps on a chair.

“You have been working long hours to-day perhaps, Jean” — her voice expressed cold disapproval — “you are not dressed yet.”

Jean's hand swept the great shocks of hair back from his forehead, and again he laughed in the same low way.

“I have not been working to-day. I have been waiting — for five o'clock.”

What did he mean? She was genuinely disturbed now. Had he been drinking — after the reception — through the night — and since? He was certainly not himself! It was outrageous, if it were not in fun, that he had locked the door! She walked across the room to the bell-cord and pulled it. The bell rang clamorously in the concierge's apartment below.

“I will have Hector prepare some coffee, while you are upstairs dressing, Jean,” she said imperiously. “Now, go and dress. You are behaving in a most peculiar manner.”

He made no answer — only stood there looking at her, his head thrown back on his powerful shoulders, his eyes still abnormally bright, though the flush was receding now from the strong, handsome face, that,

as it grew white, grew very set. Where was Hector? She pulled the cord again. Again the bell jangled in the concierge's below.

"Hector and Madame Mi-mi, his wife, are on a holiday — with five francs apiece in their pockets — at the Bois, I think — to celebrate last night" — he jerked out the words in a colourless, even way.

She noticed that his lips twitched, that the knuckles of his hands were white because his hands at his sides were so tightly clenched. He had sent Hector and madame away — she was quite alone in the place with him. What did it mean? Jean had never been like this before. But she was at least quite mistress of herself! She drew herself up, walked back across the room, picked up her gloves and wraps, and returned to the door.

"Open that door!" she commanded levelly. "What do you mean by acting like this? How dare you act like this? Are you mad — have you lost your senses? Do you realise what you are doing?"

He laughed outright now — with sudden harshness, bitterly.

"Mad?" he repeated in a choked voice. "Yes; I am mad! I have been mad for two years — and I have been a fool. I am mad now — but I am no longer a fool. I am going to know now — I am going to have an answer now — this afternoon — before you leave this room. When are you going to marry me?"

"Marry you?" — she started back.

"Don't do that!" he flung out passionately. "Don't *act*! It is no surprise, that — eh? You know! Your soul knows! I love you — I have loved you since that first time on the bridge, you remember, don't you — that bridge — when your eyes turned my blood to fire? You knew it then — you know it now!"

Once she had told herself, once in those early days before familiarity, intimacy perhaps, had blunted the eager edge of curiosity and interest with which she had studied her new sensation much as one might study a specimen under a microscope, that the man was a smouldering volcano, the soul of him elemental and turbulent. It had grown dim and hazy, that little mental note of classification — but she remembered it now. It was true! Why had she ever lost sight of it? What would he do? She was not afraid, only — only — he must not have the mastery, even for a single instant. There had been eruptions before — little ones. She had always controlled him — he was just like some great, big animal — one must never let go the leash! And, besides, some day, probably, she *would* marry him!

She laughed now in her turn — shortly.

“And do you think, do you imagine, Monsieur Jean” — her voice rang sharply through the room — “that you will attain your object any the more readily by acting like this?”

“Yes; I think so!” — Jean was stepping toward her, reaching out his arms to grasp her.

“*Jean!*” — she retreated backward, with a startled cry. The man’s face was positively livid, the eyes were burning into hers.

“I love you!” — his voice was hoarse, shrill, out of control. “I love you! My God, I love you! Do you think that you can own a man’s soul and not pay the price? You made me love you! In a thousand ways you asked for my love — in a thousand ways you —”

“Jean!” she cried at him again — half running now back across the room.

“Yes, you did!” he shouted passionately, following

her. "Yes, you did — or you have been playing with me! But if you have been playing with me, the playing is ended now, do you understand? It is ended! And whether you have been playing or not, you have made me love you, and you are mine — you belong to me — you shall be mine! That is how much I love you! You are mine — *mine!* You shall tell that cursed Paul Valmain to go about his business! Do you understand that, too? I saw you last night!"

She caught at the straw — as, flinging aside the portières in her retreat, she backed through the archway into the *atelier*.

"Ah, it is that, then? It is Paul Valmain then, that is the cause of this! Well, at least, Paul Valmain is incapable of such actions!"

"There is much that Paul Valmain is incapable of!" he answered furiously. "And one thing is that he, or any other man, shall ever have you!"

She glanced hurriedly over her shoulder. It was a large room, the *atelier*, larger even than the salon, but she was almost across it now, and the huge statue of Jean's "*Fille du Régiment*," his "Daughter of the Regiment," his newest work, that was nearing completion, blocked the way.

"Jean," she burst out desperately, "what is it? What do you mean? There is no need for this! There — there was no need to lock that door, to send Hector away! Do you know what you are doing? Have you lost your reason to treat me like this? Have you forgotten what — what you owe to my father — that — that I am his daughter?"

"Ah, you will twist and wriggle, and you will not answer, eh?" — the words seemed to scorch and burn on his lips. "It is always like this! You evade, you elude, you ask other questions. You know why I have

done this! I have told you. I owe your father nothing — nothing! Do you hear — nothing! It is he who owes! Ask him! They are his own words come true. Ask him what the name of Jean Laparde has done for him! He is not merely a paltry millionaire to-day — he is a famous man! The debt is paid a thousandfold — even to the money, franc for franc, that he has spent. You know well enough why I have done this! It is not like the days of Bernay-sur-Mer when the poor fisherman dared only dream and smother the passion in him like some mean, crawling thing, and thank the God who made him, and hold himself blessed for the crumbs that were flung to him — a smile from those lips of yours — a finger touch upon the sleeve, when it seemed all heaven and hell could not keep my arms back from you! I have waited! I let you put me off until — until the hour should come when no man or woman in the world should put off Jean Laparde! Until — yes, *sacré nom de miséricorde!* — until I should be able to forget, forget, forget, do you understand, *forget* that I was once a poor fisherman when I looked at you. Well, it has come, that hour! What tribute in all the history of France was ever paid to man as was paid to me last night? *Sacré nom*, it is no fisherman that speaks to you now! It is I — Jean Laparde, the sculptor of France! I am rich! Kings, princes, the nobles, the world comes to my door and begs — do you hear, *begs* the entrée! What more do you ask? My God ” — he was clutching at his cravat, loosening it from his throat, as though it were choking him — “you shall no longer put off my love!”

She had halted — because she could retreat no further. The face of the statue, a life-size figure of a girl in tattered uniform, the corsage torn, the hair

dishevelled, the form crouched a little as though pressing forward in the face of mighty stress, the hands beating at a drum that was slung from the shoulders, looked down upon her. And it seemed to bring quick, instant, another weapon to her hand. That *something* in the face, those lips! It was in every piece of work he had ever done. All talked of it, all saw it — and wondered. A strange exhilaration was upon her. She was not afraid. In his passion, passion like this, Jean was superb. To have aroused passion such as this in a man was as to have drunk of wine! But to yield? Never — until the day when she was quite ready to yield. To master him, hold him, curb him — yes, a thousand times! His face was close to hers, his breath was hot upon her cheeks, his hands were stretching out for her again. She pushed him away violently.

“You talk of love!” she flashed out. “What do you know of love? What *kind* of love could you have for me?” She swept her hand around, pointing to the statue. “Who is this secret model that all Paris talks about — that everybody has been talking about for months — that lives in the face and always in the lips of everything you do? That though the face of one statue is like the face of no other one, yet she is there! You talk to me of love! At what strange hours does she come here, that no one sees her? How does she come? Where do you keep her?”

For an instant, Jean drew back, staring at her wildly — but only for an instant. The next, he had caught her arm in an iron grip.

“You are clever!” he whispered hoarsely. “You are too *damned* clever! You are at it again, eh — to sidetrack me? It has been like that for two years now — always in some way, by some trick, you put me off!

But you will put me off no more. You can play no trick here. We are alone, and I will not be tricked. It is not true what you say! There is no model like that! It is a lie!" His voice swelled until it rang out in a strong, vibrant note. "The model is here — here in my heart — in my brain! That face and form is the face and form of France! It is the womanhood of France, the glory of my country! No man before has ever conceived it. It was for me — for me — Jean Laparde — to do! Do you hear — it is the face and the womanhood of France! You do not understand — you are not a Frenchwoman. And you do not understand me — who am a Frenchman!" His voice dropped low again, hoarse in its passion. "You have gone too far!" His grip on her arm tightened. "You love me, or you have played with me — it is all the same! The two years have made you mine! You *are* mine — now — now! You would starve my love, would you, you wonderful, beautiful, glorious woman!"

He was drawing her closer and closer to him. Passion, loosened, freed, rocking the man to the soul, was in eyes and face, in the half parted lips, in the short, quick, panting breath. And for a moment, fascinated, she was lifeless; then with all her strength she wrenched and strove to free herself.

"You would not *dare!*" she gasped. "You would not —"

"Dare!" — the word was a wild, hollow laugh. "Dare! Does a man dare to save his soul from torment? See — your lips! Your lips! Ah, God — your lips!"

She was his — *his!* She was in his arms, crushed to him! His — as his mad desire had bade him crush her in his arms long since in that other life in Bernay-sur-Mer; his — as he had dreamed of crushing her in his

arms, of crushing her ravishing form close to him in the dreams of the days and nights, every day and night since then. It was all blind madness, a delirium of ecstasy. How warm and hot those lips of hers from which his soul was drinking! God, how she struggled! But her lips — her lips were his — his to rain his kisses of passionate thirst upon — and upon her face, and upon her eyes, and upon her hair. If only she would not struggle so, that he might smother his face, bury it in the intoxicating fragrance of that hair!

She beat at him with her fists. He could not hold her still. She was strong, strong as some young lioness. They were swaying around the room, now this way, now that — and now through the portières into the salon. She made no cry — how could she cry? — he strangled the cries unborn upon her lips with his kisses! Ah, he had her now — she was passive at last — her head was bent far back in his arms. Yes, now — now! To feel the life, the heart throb, the pulse of that lithe form against his own — to hold his lips to hers in a kiss long as all eternity — to —

And then in a numbed, blank way he was standing back and staring at her. Footsteps, laughter, voices were coming from the street outside, coming up the steps — and, where it had seemed that her strength was gone, in a paroxysm of terror, of desperation, she had torn herself away from him. And now — yes — her face was as white as death itself. What made it like that? What had happened? He passed his hand dazedly across his eyes.

“Quick! That door!” she breathed frantically. “They must not find it *locked*!” She snatched up her outer wraps, slipped them on, and, with a most marvellous display of composure, assumed a languid attitude in a chair. Outwardly, Myrna Bliss was quite

calm and undisturbed again. "Quick! The door — *quick!*" she whispered.

The door! Some one was coming! Yes, of course! His brain was reeling, stupefied. The door! He fumbled in his pocket for the key, and in a mechanical way turned it in the lock. And then they were trooping into the salon, a dozen of them, men and women.

"Wasn't it a charming idea!" some one exclaimed in effusive greeting. "But the credit is all Myrna's, of course. We've come, you know, to —"

Jean did not hear any more. With a start, he raised his head and glanced down the room. Myrna's idea — this! A little twisted smile of understanding came to Jean's lips. Self-possessed, animated, she was already the centre of a group where everybody was talking at once.

And then Paul Valmain's pale, aristocratic, esthetic face came before him. The man was bowing, murmuring polite conventionalities; only somehow the man's eyes, instead of meeting his, seemed to be set with peculiar fixedness upon some object. Automatically, Jean followed their direction with his own — to his own hand hanging at his side.

The door key was still clasped in his fingers!

— III —

IN THE DEAD OF THE NIGHT

THE temptation was very great. But what would Father Anton say? What would Madame Garneau, with whom she lodged, *think?* To go out at this time of night! It was very late. It was long after midnight, because it was very long ago when she had heard some distant church clock strike twelve — and since then it had struck many times, the quarters, the half hours, only she had lost count.

Marie-Louise drew her cloak a little more closely around her, as she leaned on the casement of her open window — and then remained quite still and motionless again.

Irrelevantly it seemed, her thoughts turned on Hector, the concierge. How very blue Hector's eyes were, and how very red his hair, and altogether how very droll a figure he made with his absurd self-importance; and how fat his wife was, whom he so ridiculously called Mi-mi! And then that conversation between the concierge and his wife in Jean's salon early that morning, at which she had been present, began to run through her mind.

"*Tiens!*" Hector had said to his wife. "But will she not make the thrifty wife for some lucky fellow, our little Louise Bern, here — eh? She is already waiting an hour in the mornings to be let in. An hour, mind you, *ma belle* Mi-mi — and we who think we rise so early! It is a lesson that! Would you have her

standing out in the cold? Why not a key that she may come in and do her work?"

"But Monsieur Jean," madame had objected mildly, "might be angry if he knew."

"Monsieur Jean," Hector had replied fatuously, and folding his arms with an air, "is very well content to leave such matters to me. I do not pester Monsieur Jean with details. On the night after the reception, even in the exceedingly bad humour in which I found him, when I told him that I had thought the matter over, and that the work was too hard, and that you were wasting away — you see, *ma Mi-mi*, how I lie for you — and that I had decided — 'decided' was the word I used — that I must have some one in the mornings to help with the work, did he not say: 'But assuredly, Hector, assuredly; whatever you think is right. I depend upon you, *mon ami*.' And does that not show that we understand each other, Monsieur Jean and I — eh?"

"It was Father Anton, not you, whose idea it was," madame had corrected with conscientious earnestness. "It was Father Anton, that evening after we had returned from the Bois and before you had seen Monsieur Jean, who suggested it, and spoke of Louise here. And that was not what Monsieur Jean said, for I was listening outside the door. He said you were a red-headed buffoon, and to go to the devil and not bother him."

"And what then?" Hector, though slightly disconcerted, had rejoined with acerbity. "Your tongue is forever clacking! Do I ever recount an event but that you must put in your word? But that is not the point. It is Father Anton who says Louise is an honest girl and to be trusted — and that is enough!"

It was not so irrelevant after all. She was twisting

the key in her fingers now. The key to Jean's house in the Rue Vanitaire. How still the night was! It seemed so strange that in so great a city where there were such multitudes of people it could be so still. It was almost as still as that other night when she had sat at her window in Bernay-sur-Mer, that night when the *bon Dieu* had made her see that for Jean's sake their ways lay so very wide apart. She was glad, very glad that the *bon Dieu* had helped her then to put nothing in Jean's way, because Jean had done so very much more even than any one had dreamed of.

But it was so strange, so strange! To hear everybody talking about Jean — on the streets — little snatches of conversation — even here amongst the very poor — even Madame Garneau, who that afternoon had stopped in the scrubbing of the floor, and, waving the scrubbing brush excitedly to point the words, must needs tell her, Marie-Louise, all about the great Laparde! How proud they all were of Jean, because Jean had brought such honour upon their beloved France! But it was so strange, so strange — that they did not know — that they did not know that, oh, for so many, many years it had been just Jean and Marie-Louise, and glad, glad days, with the blue sky above, and the strong arms upon the oars — and — and that she loved Jean, that all her life she had loved him, that all her life until she should come to die she would love Jean. It was strange that all these people did not know, because it seemed that she knew nothing else, because it seemed to be the only thing in all the world. But it was good that they did not know, because otherwise she could not even be here as she was, she could not even be Louise Bern for a little while, and be near Jean, and see the work that she loved because it was Jean's work, and because — and because those mar-

vellous figures that he fashioned seemed somehow now to mean everything that there was in life for her, as though her own life were wrapped up in them, given in exchange for them, as though indeed she were a very part of them, and they were of her blood and flesh.

She pressed her hands very tightly together over the key, and then opened them and let the key lay in her palm to look at it in the moonlight. She had seen so little in the studio, so very little! In the three mornings she had been there, there had always been Madame Mi-mi to fuss around her, to instruct her in her work, or, failing that as an excuse — to gossip. And if it were not madame, then it was Hector — and often it was both. And she had so wanted to be alone there — it was not very much to ask, that — just to be alone there for a little time with Jean's things around her, to be very quiet, to be alone.

Why should she not go now? It was not a sin that she would commit. It was only that if Father Anton knew, or Madame Garneau knew they would not understand — but they would never know. No one would ever know. Jean would be upstairs asleep; and Hector and his wife would be downstairs in bed. That statue, that wonderful statue of the girl with the drum, would be more wonderful than ever with the bright moonlight pouring in upon it through that great glass roof of the *atelier*. She had seen so little of it, because when she was there it was always wrapped up in damp cloths; she had seen it only when that absurd Hector had exhibited it to her with a patronising air as though he had modelled it himself, making use of a flood of technical expressions of which she did not understand a word, and of whose meaning she was quite sure he was equally ignorant, but having heard the words around the studio repeated them like a parrot. She had seen

so little of it, when her soul cried out to see so much. It haunted her, that statue — why, she did not know. It was before her always — in her dreams, which were always dreams of the salon and the *atelier*, the figure with the drum always stood out above everything else, even though everything else, even though the very smallest things and details there were so dear and intimate too. Was it a sin to go and stand and look, when her heart was so full of the longing that it would not be denied? Who was there to say, “you went to Jean’s studio at two o’clock in the morning,” when, in the quiet and the stillness there, there would be only herself, and that great figure with the drum, and the *bon Dieu*, who made Jean do such wondrous things, to know?

She turned from the window and tiptoed across the little room, and took the little black velvet turban with its white cockade, that Father Anton had given her, down from where it hung upon a nail on the wall, and fastened her cloak tightly about her for fear that it might brush against something and make a noise, and stole then to the door, and out into the hallway, and to the front door of the tenement. Yes, she would go — but no one must know — only herself, and that great figure with the drum, and — and the *bon Dieu*, who would understand.

And so she went out into the night, and across the city, and to the Rue Vanitaire, and to Jean’s studio; and all the way her heart was beating quickly, and she was a little frightened, and avoided the people that she met, for no one must know — and even at the last, when the goal was reached, and she stood before the house and saw that it was dark in all the windows, and she had only to enter, there came even then a little added thrill of fear. The street, she had thought, was de-

serted, and suddenly, as she stood there, it — it seemed as though some one hiding across the street had stepped out of concealment, and as suddenly had disappeared again. She caught her breath, and stood for a long tense moment gazing in that direction. And then at last she smiled a little tremulously. It — it was only a shadow. Yes, she was quite sure now that it was only a shadow — she could see the flickering of the street lamp on the wall of the building, where she had thought she had seen something else. It was very foolish of her to be like this. She had never been afraid in Bernay-sur-Mer — only everything here was so strange — and it was very late — and — and she was going into Jean's studio — and no one must know. And then she mounted the steps very cautiously, and unlocked the door and closed it softly — and in another moment, slipping across the hall, past the foot of the stairs that led to Jean's sleeping apartments above, she had entered the salon and shut the door behind her.

It was quite dark here, too dark almost to distinguish anything — the only light was a tiny, truant moonbeam that strayed in from the *atelier* between the portières of the archway. It was in there — the great figure with the drum! But she would not go there for a moment yet. It was here, too, that Jean was present in everything about her. It was here that his friends, those that he cared for now, the people of the *grand monde* came to see Jean. She could not see the things around her, but they were very clearly pictured in her mind — the beautiful rugs, so soft and silky to the touch, that hung from the walls; the queer, spindly furniture, that did not seem made for use at all, that she had been afraid to touch at first for fear it would break, it looked so fragile; the dark, glossy floor, like

a mirror, that she had polished only that morning; the — her thoughts were suddenly, disturbingly, flying off at a tangent.

That morning! It brought a quick twinge of pain to Marie-Louise's heart. The salon had been — had been — oh, she did not know how to describe it — only Madame Mi-mi had said it was often like that, that Jean led the gay life, and why not, since he had the *sous* to pay and was rich? There had been broken glasses, and confusion, and callous ruin of things that were priceless, and cards strewn over the floor — and — and somehow she had not been able to keep her eyes from being wet all the time she had been cleaning up the room. It — it made her heart very heavy, and very sorrowful. And yet, too, in a way, she could understand — because she understood Jean. Long, long ago she had been afraid — afraid of his success for him, even while she had prayed for it. If Jean had only a mother, only some one whose love would hold him back. If he were married — if he had a wife — it would change all this sort of life that he led now. Yes; if he were married! She could think of that quite calmly, in a perfectly impersonal way. Why should she not? Some day Jean would marry — marry some one out of this new world in which she had no part, which to her was so very strange and foreign and hard to understand; but which to Jean was so natural, and which, henceforth, could be the only life he would know. Yes; she could think of his marrying quite calmly. And why not? She had no longer part in that — she had passed out of Jean's life long ago, that day in Bernay-sur-Mer. Perhaps it would be Mademoiselle Bliss — Hector had hinted at it and winked prodigiously. She found her hand clenching very hard at her side. It seemed very, very strange,

and it was very, very curious that, while she could think quite calmly of Jean marrying some one because it would be very good for Jean to marry, a pang came and her heart rebelled when the "some one," instead of being vague and general and indefinite, became a particular "some one" that was very definite and was not vague at all!

Marie-Louise sighed a little. She did not understand. Everything was so hard to understand. She sighed again — and then, walking slowly across the room, she parted the portières and stepped into the *atelier*.

Here, for an instant, she stood hesitant, just inside the archway, looking about her. How bright the moonlight was, and how it poured in and bathed everything in its soft luminous glow, except that, strangely, there seemed to be a shadow on the white-wrapt statue of the girl that puzzled her for a moment — ah, yes, it was the door of the dressing-room, the room where Hector said the models prepared for their poses, that was wide open and kept the moonlight from the statue. She moved forward, closed the door quietly, and went then and uncovered the clay figure and stood before it. She could look her fill now — yet it seemed that she could never do that, for her craving and her longing were insatiable. All other things in this life of Jean's, in this life of hers that she was living for a little while, filled her with dismay and confusion; but this, this work of Jean's, this figure before her was real, it seemed somehow to bring her closer to her own world, to those things she could understand. She did not know why — only that it was so, and that it was perhaps because of that the girl with the drum had been haunting her so constantly.

She sat down at last on the little platform that served

Jean to stand upon for his work. It thrilled her, made her pulse leap, this strong, magnificent figure of womanhood, this torn and tattered soldier-girl; and one sensed and felt and lived, it seemed, the battle-wrack around the figure; one saw, it seemed, the stern, set-faced, shot-thinned ranks that followed to the beating of the drum; one listened to catch the tramp of feet, the hoarse cheers, the roar of guns. It seemed to be the call of France, the call to victory and glory, or to death perhaps, but to dishonour never; it seemed to breathe the love of country that was beyond all thought of self, fearful of no odds; it seemed to mean that in the heart of France itself lived the courage that had never measured sacrifice; it seemed as though those clay lips parted, and above the din of conflict, of battle and of strife she could hear the voice ring out in deathless words: "Forward — for France!"

But it was not only that alone that held her enthralled. It was the face, with the moonlight full upon it now. It was beautiful, it was glorious — but there was something more. There was something in the face that seemed to stir a memory, a world of memories within her. There was something familiar in the face — there seemed to be something there that she recognised and yet could not define. She had seen that face all her life — all her life. It belonged to every one that she had ever known in Bernay-sur-Mer — and yet it belonged to no one at all that she could name. But then — it was not finished yet. Perhaps when it was finished she would know. It would be finished now in a few days more, Hector had said; and he had said, too, that it would be the greatest work Jean had ever done.

If she could only watch it until it was finished! If she could only do that — afterwards she would go

away. It was only for a little while that she had come to Paris — only for a little while. If she could do that! If she could come to-morrow night, and the nights after that until it was all finished, just as she had come to-night! Yes, yes — *yes!* Yes, she would come! She would watch it grow, and watch so eagerly and so tensely the face that was so well-known yet so elusive now!

“*La Fille du Régiment!*” Her hands cupping her chin, she sat there as motionless, as silent as the statue itself; sat there absorbed, unconscious of the passing time. It was strange the face should be familiar! It was strange that there, too, had been something familiar in the face of that figure in the park that Father Anton had taken her to see, in the face of every other figure that the curé had pointed out to her as Jean’s work! She had gone back to look at them alone; but they, although they were finished, had not answered her question, had not told her who they were. But this one, this one was *almost* telling her now — there was only to come a touch, just a touch from Jean’s hand — that would perhaps be there when she came to-morrow night — and then she would know.

And so she sat there, and the hours passed, and the moonlight faded, and the grey of dawn crept into the room — and Marie-Louise roused herself with a start. And at first dismay was upon her. It was morning — too late to go home! And then she shook her head, and smiled happily — happily, because she had spent glad and happy hours, and there was no need to be dismayed. Presently, she would go about her work — to which she had come early, that was all. And at her lodging, Madame Garneau would find the bed made because it was always made before she left there in the morning, before Madame Garneau was up.

— IV —

THE ACCUSATION

THERE was a sullen, angry set to Jean's lips, a scowl on his face that gathered his forehead into heavy furrows, as, at his accustomed morning hour, a little after nine, he entered the *atelier*. He had not slept well the night before — nor for the nights before that — not since that afternoon here with Myrna. How could one sleep with things in the mess they were — to say nothing of the night before last when he had not tried to sleep, and had held high revel with a few choice spirits in a sort of dare-devil challenge to the premonition that promised him a reckoning for those few moments in which he had sought to quench the passion that raged in his soul, that set his brain afire!

He crossed the room, mechanically donned his sculptor's blouse, or over-dress, threw off the wrappings from the "*Fille du Régiment*," picked up a modelling tool, stepped upon the platform — and stared into the face that looked back at him from the high-flung, splendid head of clay. He snarled suddenly, clenching his fist. They prated to him of secret models! Bah! It was too much for them! They could not understand — it was beyond them — that was all! It was there, all of it, the courage, the resolution, the purity, the strength, the virility of the womanhood of France — all — all — it was all there — and they thought it wonderful, incomparable — only they prated of a se-

cret model — *nom de Dieu* — when it was themselves, when it was France that was the model — and they had not grasped the apotheosis of their separate individualities in the sublime glory of the composite whole! Ha, ha — perhaps it was because they were modest!

He smiled with intolerant contempt. They prated of a secret model, they applauded, they cheered, they showered him with wealth, with fame, the world knew the name of Jean Laparde — and, because they were unable to comprehend, they asked for something more, something that, no doubt, should label his work like raised letters for the blind — and then perhaps it would be only to find that they had still to acquire the alphabet! Bah — it was sickening, that! But it was also maddening! There was old Bidelot, who came each day to the studio. Bidelot was a fool — a senile old fool, who sat and wept weak tears because the statue was so beautiful; and wept weaker tears because, like a spoilt child, he cried for something that he wanted without knowing what it was!

“You talk — you rant — you whimper — you bemoan!” he had flared out angrily at Bidelot yesterday afternoon. “Well, what is it? Do you find it a pitiful affair, then, my ‘*Fille du Régiment*’?”

“Ah, Jean! Ah, no! Ah, no!” old Bidelot had cried. “It is not that! It is exquisite, it is magnificent, it is superb, it transcends anything the world has ever seen. It is so great that if only there were a little something, ah, *mon* Jean, a little something, it would be the work of a god and not a man!”

“And that something? What is it?” he had demanded.

And old Bidelot had wrung his hands, and the tears had coursed down his cheeks.

“I do not know! I do not know!” the famous

critic had answered almost hysterically. "If I knew I would tell you. It is but a touch — but a touch."

Old Bidelot was emotional — an ass! Old Bidelot was fast approaching his dotage! Jean shrugged his shoulders wrathfully. It was not true, of course! It lacked nothing, that face — and yet — and yet that sort of thing disquieted him, irritated him. It was a masterpiece — and its only fault was that it had not been made by a god! *Ciel!* Was there ever anything more absurd than that! Well, in any event, it was to bring him one hundred and twenty-five thousand francs; and his next commission, which was for the Government of France, would be for double that amount. Old Bidelot and his "touch"! For France, when this was finished, he would do that dream statue, if — *damn* that dream statue!

Jean snarled again. What was the matter with him! The cursed thing was always in his mind; but never would it come and appear before him, lifelike and actual, that bronze figure of the woman, as once it had done. Instead, it seemed to have faded more and more completely away, until it was as invisible as the base of the statue which he had never been able to see at all, and yet at which the passers-by in his dreams had gazed with the same rapt attention as at the woman's figure — it had faded until the whole existed simply as an indistinct blur upon the memory. If he could visualise that figure again, get the detail, he could supply a base of some sort that would go with it; that would come simply enough once he got to work. *Would* it! He had thought until his brain was sick, for hours on end, trying to imagine a fitting subject, big enough, splendid enough to harmonise with what he remembered was the majestic beauty of the woman's figure — and the hours had only made the task seem

the more beyond him, his each succeeding imaginary design the more inadequate and pitiful.

It made him angry now, increased and inflamed his already irritable and savage mood. Why had he started in to think of that! Why, in heaven's name, should he think of everything that morning that he did not want to think of! Why, when nothing else would come, should the cold, enigmatical face of Paul Valmain staring at that confounded key, come so readily before him, and — he hurled his modelling tool suddenly, savagely, into the far corner of the room; and, stepping down from the platform, pulled viciously at the bell. He was yanking his blouse off over his head, as Hector appeared.

"Get my car, Hector!" he snapped tersely. "I am going out."

Hector's blue eyes widened in amazement. The car in the morning — the morning that was sacred to work!

"The car, m'sieu?" he repeated, as though he had not heard aright.

"Yes, imbecile — the car!" Jean snapped again.

"But, m'sieu!" It was unheard of! It had never occurred before! "But is m'sieu not going to work this morning, and —"

"The *car*!"

"But, yes, m'sieu — instantly — instantly, m'sieu!" Hector stammered — and retreated hastily from the room.

Jean followed him — spent a few impatient moments kicking at the sidewalk while he waited; and then, at the wheel of his big, powerful machine, went tearing up the street. Work! It was worse than useless in the vile humour he was in. The car had been an inspiration; he would go nowhere in particular, but he

would drive — fast. That was what he wanted, some excitement, some exhilaration. He would go out into the country, anywhere, with the whole day before him, and — no! He would go first to Myrna's house! Why not! He scowled heavily again. It was getting beyond endurance, that sort of thing! There had been three, no, four days of it now! The decision quite fitted in with his mood — whatever might be the result. Yes, *nom d'un nom*, he would go there — and at once!

It was but a short way; and, at the expiration of a few minutes, Jean stopped his car in front of the magnificent residence that Henry Bliss maintained in a style that was almost regal, jumped out, and ran up the steps.

"Mademoiselle Bliss," he said to the liveried automaton that answered his summons.

"Mademoiselle Bliss is out, Monsieur Laparde," replied the man.

"Very well, then — Monsieur Bliss," returned Jean, a little grimly.

"Monsieur Bliss is not at home, Monsieur Laparde," replied the man.

Jean bit his lip. That Henry Bliss might still be away, since he had gone to London some days before, was probably true; but that Myrna was out at ten o'clock in the morning — the man, under instructions, was lying, of course! He stood hesitant, his rage increasing, half inclined to reach out and twist the neck of this bedecked functionary — and then, with a short laugh, he swung on his heel, went down the steps again, and climbed back into the car.

The car shot forward in a savage bound. She was probably watching him from behind the curtain of a window! His hands clenched fiercely on the steering

wheel—and he flung the throttle wide. It was enough! This had lasted long enough! It was her idea of punishment, perhaps! “Mademoiselle Bliss is out, Monsieur Laparde”—he mimicked the colourless-voiced flunky viciously. To telephones, personal calls—the same answer; to notes—no answer at all. Well, she would answer—and soon! He would take care of that, and—he jammed the brakes frantically on the machine, as a figure, barely escaping disaster as the result of his reckless driving, jumped wildly away from in front of the car; while a voice shouted in sharp protest:

“Hey, there—where are you going!”

“To the devil!” snarled Jean—and chuckled the next instant with sudden malicious delight, as he recognised the other. It was Father Anton—on his way to the Bliss residence, probably.

“You are travelling fast, my son!”—grave and quiet, the note of protest gone, Father Anton’s voice came back from the curb—and then the old priest was blotted from sight, and the car was speeding down the boulevard again.

Hah! Father Anton! Father Anton—the grandmother! Father Anton, who had thought on arriving in Paris to lecture him, Jean Leparde, on how he should live, and sermonise on the pleasures of the flesh, and the dangers of power and wealth and position, and to haunt the studio with a sanctimoniously grieved expression everlastingly on his face! Ha, ha! Father Anton! Father Anton was the man who once had preached so fatuously on the nothingness of fame! Well, Father Anton, if he were not blind, could—again Jean checked the car violently, this time in response to a harsh, strident, authoritative command.

And then a gendarme was running alongside, gesticu-

lating furiously — but the next moment the man was touching his cap.

“ Ah, it is Monsieur Laparde! *Pardon, mille pardons*, Monsieur Laparde!” The man’s voice dropped to a low tone, as he leaned in over the side of the car. “ But if monsieur will be good enough to have a care. It will get us into trouble if we do not do our duty, and monsieur would not like that to happen. Ah, monsieur ” — at Jean’s five-franc piece. “ Ah — ”

The car was off again. But now Jean laughed aloud. Fame! Who was there that did not know Jean Laparde — from the President of France to the gamin of the gutters! It began to salve a little his irritation, his ugly mood. To the devil with Father Anton — as he had just now had the pleasure of intimating to him. There was little that was empty in the fame that was his. Wealth had been poured upon him; there was nothing, nothing that was beyond his reach, nothing that he could desire and be obliged to refuse himself; and, yes — *cré nom*, one could say it for it was true — throughout all France he was worshipped as though he were a demigod. He had only to enter a café anywhere, and in a moment from the tables around he would catch the whispers: “ Look! There is Jean Laparde, the great sculptor!” And position — what man in all of France, or in Europe, occupied a position comparable to his! None! There was none! He would change places with no one! He owed allegiance to none; he received it from all. He received the cheers, the acclaim of the populace; the decorations of governments and royalty! And none could take this from him. It was his! And there were to be years of it — all the years he lived. He was young yet. Years of it! He was Jean Laparde, Jean Laparde, Jean Laparde — the man whose

name sent a magic thrill even to his own soul. God, how he loved it all with a passion and a desire and an insatiability that was rooted in his very breath of life!

The car was speeding now out through the suburbs of the great city — on — on — on! His thoughts were bringing him exhilaration in abundant measure; something in the sense of freedom, in the swift motion, brought him elated excitement. His blood was whipping buoyantly through his veins. There would be a day of this — to go somewhere, anywhere — without plan, or predetermination, this road or that, it mattered not at all — a day of it — prompted no longer by the sullen, disgruntled mood that had caused him to set out, but by a more potent and saner spirit of almost boyish vagabondage that bade him keep on.

Myrna! He smiled now. He was a fool to have spoilt the last few days for himself just because he had not seen her! Let her have her way for a while, if it pleased her! No doubt she was trying to discipline him! It was delightful, that! Discipline Jean Laparde! It was he who would play the rôle of disciplinarian before he was through — not she! He loved her, wanted her — and, by Heaven, he was Jean Laparde! And what Jean Laparde wanted was his! She belonged to him, and his she would be, and no other man's! Paul Valmain, eh? Next time he would deal with Paul Valmain, and not with Myrna. The poor fool — who ranted and raved and screamed like a cockatoo on the floor of the Chamber of Deputies, and dreamed that it was impassioned eloquence! It would be well for Paul Valmain to take another road than that of Jean Laparde! The poor fool — that did not know the power of Jean Laparde! He held Paul Valmain, as he held every other man in France, between his thumb and forefinger — to pinch, if he saw

fit. A whisper in the ear of this one and that, and Paul Valmain was as dead politically as though he had never been born.

And now Jean threw back his head and laughed boisterously. All that was no exaggeration; it was literally true. He even held Myrna in exactly the same position. He could break her socially — as readily as he could break a twig from a tree! It was even ludicrous, it was so simple. Imagine Myrna in such a state! Imagine what would happen if he let it be known that Jean Laparde would attend no function at which Mademoiselle Bliss was a guest! It was too funny, too droll! And she had dreams perhaps of disciplining Jean Laparde!

His face flushed a little. She was his! He had felt those warm, rich lips against his own! He would feel them there again a thousand times — ay, and soon again! He would not wait this time — as he had waited, fool that he had been, before! But for a day or so, if it pleased her to ride upon a high horse, let her go fast and furious — afterwards, that was quite another matter. Afterwards, those lips would be his again, that glorious, pulsing body would be in his arms again — and in the meantime — here was a great level stretch of road before him — and the day was before him — and the to-morrow could take care of itself!

And so Jean rode far that day; and lunched at a quaint little village near the Belgian frontier; and quite lost himself; and dined in a farmhouse; and finally, set upon the road again, reached Paris after midnight, where he alighted in front of his club. He was in a "humour" now, as he put it himself. A little supper and a hand at cards would complete, round out a day of rare delight. He was even humming an air to himself, as he entered the club.

"*Pardon*, Monsieur Laparde!" — the doorman was bowing respectfully. "Monsieur Valmain is in one of the private writing rooms — the one at the head of the stairs, monsieur."

Jean stopped his humming, and stared at the man.

"Well — and what of that?" he demanded.

"But, monsieur!" murmured the man, a little abashed. "Monsieur expects to meet Monsieur Valmain, does he not? Monsieur Valmain left word."

Jean scowled, and passed on. Paul Valmain! Paul Valmain! What devil of perversity had seen fit to drag Paul Valmain upon the scene? Was his day to be ruined by a bad taste in his mouth? What did the man want?

He went upstairs, knocked upon the door indicated, and, without waiting for an answer, opened it rather brusquely, stepped inside — and, with an exclamation of angry surprise, gazed at the man who seemed literally to have rushed across the room to confront him. Paul Valmain's face was positively livid, the eyes burned as though consumed with fever, the hands shook, and the tall form quivered in the most astonishing fashion. Was the man mad?

"Ah, Monsieur Jean Laparde!" the other cried out. "You have come at last! You saw fit to absent yourself to-day! I have been five times to the studio! But you thought it better to answer my message finally, eh? You did well! I should have gone again in an hour to dig you out!"

Jean eyed the other for a moment, contempt struggling with bewilderment for the mastery at the man's actions and incoherent outburst.

"You have perhaps been drinking," he said coldly. "I received no message until I entered the club here an instant ago. And I am not to be 'dug out,' Mon-

sieur Valmain! You are using strange language. If you are drunk, apologise; otherwise —”

“Otherwise!” — the word came like a devil’s laugh from Paul Valmain; and before Jean could move, or, taken by surprise, guard himself, the flat of Paul Valmain’s hand had swung in a stinging blow across Jean’s mouth. “You — *hound!*”

The blood came surging into Jean’s face, and with a bound he had the other by the shoulders — and then, somehow, he found himself laughing — not merrily — laughing in a sort of contemptuous rage. He could take Paul Valmain with his own great strength and do with him what he pleased. But that was not the way a blow such as he had received was to be answered! And, anyway, what was the matter with the man? He must have lost his senses!

“You — hound!” — Paul Valmain was repeating hoarsely, his lips twitching in his passion. “I watched last night outside your studio. I watched, and oh, God! — I saw her enter.”

Jean’s hands dropped from the man’s shoulders in blank amazement. Yes, certainly, the man was either drunk or mad! Certainly, he was not responsible for what he was saying.

“There was no one who entered my studio last night,” he said almost pityingly.

“You liar!” — Paul Valmain was like a man beside himself, demented. “You liar — you liar — you liar! I saw her! I know now who this secret model is whose divine form you desecrate, you black-souled libertine! I saw her go in at two o’clock in the morning — *and at daylight she had not come out again.*”

Jean shrugged his shoulders intolerantly. The man was quite out of his head from some cause or other, but

that was no reason why he should be called upon to endure the other's irresponsible ranting.

"You poor fool!" he exclaimed irritably. "So you know who it is, do you? And what then? If it brings you such poignant, personal grief, why did you let her go in? Why did you not tell her that —"

"It was too late" — white to the lips, Paul Valmain raised his clenched fists — "it was too late — after months of it! I could save her only one thing — the knowledge that I knew her shame. I was across the street — I saw her — God pity me — I loved her — the black cloak and hat she wore only a few days before when we were together! I have lived in hell and torment and fear that it might be so since that afternoon — that afternoon — did you think I did not see the key in your hand, and —"

"What do you mean?" — there was a sudden blackness curiously streaked with red before Jean's eyes; the blood was sweeping in a mad tide upward in his face to pound like trip-hammers at his temples — the man's words could bear only one interpretation, a hideous one, that outraged his soul, and roused a seething fury within him. "What do you mean?" he said again between his teeth.

"I mean," Paul Valmain answered, "I mean — damn you, you know what I mean! I mean that from two o'clock in the morning until daylight Myrna Bliss was in your rooms, and —"

"You devil from hell!" Jean shouted — and leaped at the other's throat. If the man struggled he did not realise it. The man was only an impotent, powerless thing in his grasp — and he flung him away, flung him crashing to the floor. "I will kill you for that!" he whispered. "To-night — you can find a friend downstairs to act for you — I another."

Paul Valmain staggered to his feet.

"I have waited all day for the same purpose!"
The devil's laugh was on the grey lips again.

"It is *à l'outrance*, Monsieur Valmain — you understand!" — Jean choked in his fury. "*A l'outrance!*"

"As you shall see!"

"And the studio — if it suits you! We shall not be disturbed. There is room there, and you will find it as pleasant a place as any in which to die!"

"Where you will!" retorted Paul Valmain.
"Where you will — so there is no delay!"

THE SECRET MODEL

MARIE-LOUISE glanced quickly up at the house. Yes; it was all dark! There was no light in Hector's apartments below; nor in the salon; nor in Jean's rooms above. She had scarcely dared to look, for fear that she had come too soon, that Hector perhaps was still up, that Jean perhaps might be with some of his friends in the salon. But it was all dark. She was quite breathless, for she had run nearly all the way from Madame Garneau's in her eagerness; but that did not matter at all now, for she was not to be disappointed, since, after all, she had not come too soon. It was much earlier than it had been last night, when she had come for the first time to be all alone there in the studio in the moonlight, where the hours had passed so swiftly and been all too short; but it had seemed that the day would never end, that night would never come again, and the evening had dragged so cruelly as she had sat by her window — and so when that church clock from somewhere in the distance had struck midnight she could wait no longer, for perhaps to-night Jean would have finished the face, and perhaps to-night it would not all be so vague and trouble her so because it seemed that in some strange way it was so familiar, though she could not tell why.

She took the key from the pocket of her dress, and stole softly up the steps. How glad she was now that

she had not waited any longer! She would have so much more time there in the *atelier* with the wonderful figures that Jean made, that were not clay at all, but that breathed and lived, and to whom she could talk about Jean, and about his great triumph, and tell them all that was in her heart, and they would listen to her and understand as no one else could, and never tell any one that she had been there. And she would not be afraid of them at all any more, not even at first, as she had been last night because they looked so ghostlike in the white cloths that were wrapped around them.

She looked hurriedly about her, then opened the door, stepped inside, and crossed noiselessly into the salon. She could not quite still the pounding of her heart, because it was night, and because it was dark, and because she was doing something that no one must know; but she was not at all afraid now. Since last night she had been so sure that there was nothing to fear. Hector and Madame Mi-mi had thought it the most natural thing to find her working there that morning when they had got up. Was it not for that she had been given the key? And to-morrow morning again when daylight came it would be the same; and now — she was hurrying through the salon to the *atelier* — and now she was to see that splendid, glorious figure, the "*Fille du Régiment*," again, and see the face that perhaps, oh, perhaps to-night, after Jean's work of the day upon it, would be finished, and that she would recognise.

She slipped between the portières into the moonlit room, and — she could not wait even to take off her cloak and turban — tiptoed eagerly, excitedly across the *atelier*, mounted upon the modelling platform, and threw back the white damp cloth, revealing the figure's head. And then, for a moment, she could only gaze at

it, puzzled and bewildered; and then, very slowly and regretfully, she sat down upon the platform. The face had not been touched. It — it was exactly as it had been last night. Somehow, Jean had not done any work that day — or else, perhaps, he had worked on some of the other figures.

She sat staring at the face of the clay figure in a disappointment that was almost dismay — and then suddenly she smiled. After all, it was she herself who was the cause of her disappointment; she had wanted to see that face with its finished touch so much that, in her eagerness, she had quite made herself believe that she would find it so — whereas it might be days and days yet before Jean would have completed it. And instead of being disappointed, she should be very happy that the *bon Dieu* had made it possible for her to come here at all, to be so close to Jean, and to be able to spend these hours here with his work — and even if it were days and days before it was finished, could she not still come here every night until it was done, and could she not still be able to see it then?

As she looked around her, the white-wrapt figures seemed to nod to her and promise her that it would be so. How quiet and still it was, and how peacefully the moonlight filled the *atelier* — Jean's *atelier*. It was so different a scene from that magnificent reception where France in all its glory had honoured Jean; where the marble stairs, the lights, the throngs, the glittering uniforms, the marvellously dressed women with their furs and jewels had awed and frightened her, and yet had filled her, too, with ecstasy because it was Jean's triumph, and had brought thankfulness into her resignation because she had seen with her own eyes how great he had become and how little had been her own sacrifice to achieve so much. Yes, it was strange how dif-

ferent was that scene and this around her now — and yet they were both so intimate a part of Jean's life. And they were so very different to her in a personal way. She did not want to see that world of the rich and the great any more, because she could not understand it, and no one there could understand her; but here — she was so glad and happy to be here — here she could understand, and here these figures understood her when she spoke to them because they knew that she had given all she had to give, not out of her own strength but out of the strength that the *bon Dieu* had given her, that they might be created by Jean's hands. Here, Jean was so near to her; there, in that other world, he was so far away — so far away that she had gone utterly out of his life, even out of his thoughts.

She sighed a little as she sat there on the modelling platform; and then there came again that little smile of self-reproof, and with it a chiding shake of her head. It was well that it was so. There was no other way. It would have brought only distress and pain to Jean if he were always to remember, and — and it was far better so. The gulf between them was so wide and deep that it could never be passed, and if she were still living in Jean's heart it could only make life a very terrible thing for them both. And so — and so — yes, she should be very thankful for that, too; be very thankful for both their sakes that he had so entirely forgotten her.

The white-wrapt figures seemed to nod most gravely in assent again — it was only a tree branch in the courtyard frolicking with a moonbeam and sending a little playful shadow over them that seemed to make them move, but that was how they always talked to her, and made their understanding seem so real.

She sat quite still for a little while, gazing at the face

of the "*Fille du Régiment*" before her; and then, clapping her hands softly together and with an impulsive little exclamation of delight she stood up excitedly. Perhaps Jean had been working upon the statue, even if he had not touched the face. And, anyway, there was more to see than just the face — the figure itself was just as wonderful, just as beautiful. Quickly, but very carefully, she loosened and removed the covering from the body and base of the figure, let the covering fall upon the floor — and, stepping back to look at it, stood suddenly transfixed, her hands pressed tightly against her bosom, her face white with fear.

Some one was coming! She strained her eyes across the *atelier*, holding them for an instant, fascinated, upon the portières. No, no; surely she had been mistaken! It could have been only fancy, and — a low cry came from her lips. The front door had closed; there were footsteps in the hall, a number of them it seemed; and — and that was Jean's voice!

"The salon, messieurs, if you please!"

They were coming! They were entering the salon! What could she do? She could not get away or escape! There was no way to get out! They were already in the salon! She looked wildly, helplessly around her — and then, with a little gasp that mingled relief and trepidation, her eyes fixed on the door of the models' dressing room. She began to steal toward it, holding her breath. How terribly her heart pounded! She could not go very fast, because then she would make a noise and they would hear her. And that was Jean's voice again, this time from the salon itself, from just on the other side of the portières, it seemed.

"The *atelier* will serve us better than this polished floor, messieurs."

Oh, if she could only reach the dressing room in time! How hoarse Jean's voice seemed to be! She was nearly there now — nearly there! If only the *bon Dieu* would help her! It was only a step more — just one! Now — now she was there! She slipped into the little place that was hardly any bigger than a large closet, and drew the door shut behind her, as the portières were swished apart and the rings on the pole clattered with a terrifying noise. And then she found that she was very weak, and that her knees were trembling as though they would give way beneath her.

It was very dark. She dared not move for fear she might knock into something and make a noise. She told herself that she must stand very still. She could hear them out in the *atelier* now in a muffled sort of a way; they were walking around and around, and it sounded as though they were moving things about. And then she seemed to go cold with fear again, and a sense of dismay surged upon her. The "*Fille du Régiment*" was uncovered! She had had no time, even if she had thought of it, to replace the covering. What would Jean do? Would he think it was an accident, that the wrapping had been carelessly done, would he blame Hector, or — would he think some one had been there, that some one was perhaps there now, and — and suppose he should come to the dressing room door, and open it, and — and find her there!

She was frightened now, terribly afraid — more afraid than she had ever been in her life before. If Jean should find her there, what would he think of her? The blood rushed in a fierce crimson tide to her face. She would rather die than that! But it was not only herself, it was not only that — there was Jean. She had no right to obtrude herself into his life and to disturb it. But surely — surely the *bon Dieu* would keep

him away from the door! She had been very foolish and very wicked ever to have come, ever to have risked so much, only the temptation had been so great, and her heart had pleaded so hard; but — but if only no harm should come of it all this time, she would promise that — that she would not come there any more like this at night.

Perhaps he had not seen it! Perhaps he had not noticed it! And yet it was not just moonlight out there any more, and the *atelier* was lighted now, for she could see the tiny rays as they filtered in under the door where it did not fit well over the threshold. She listened intently, almost expecting to hear Jean cry out about the covering of the "*Fille du Régiment*," but they still seemed to be moving around a great deal, and the voices were indistinguishable, and she could understand nothing of what they were saying, except only a name that she caught because it was repeated several times — the name of Paul Valmain. It seemed somehow to be familiar. Yes; she remembered. He was one of Jean's friends of the *grand monde*, the man that Father Anton had pointed out beside Monsieur and Mademoiselle Bliss in that group with Jean on the night of the great reception.

It seemed as though hours were passing as she stood there. It seemed to grow unbearably hot in that small, dark place; it seemed even that it was hard to breathe. Perhaps it was her fear that was suffocating her! She unfastened the black velvet cloak and let it hang more loosely, wide apart, upon her shoulders — and held her hand agitatedly upon her bare throat, that was now exposed by the low-necked blouse. Would they never go! And what were they doing there? It was very strange! They seemed to keep on tramping and even running around, and there was no sound of voices now

— only a most peculiar sound that made her think of Papa Fregeau when he stood in the kitchen of the Bas Rhône and sharpened his carving knife on his long bone-handled steel.

Then all grew suddenly quiet — and the quiet was as suddenly broken by a voice, loud enough and distinct enough for her to hear.

“It is nothing! But a touch, monsieur — continue!”

Marie-Louise's eyes widened, and slowly her form grew rigid and tense, and her hand at her throat slipped away and caught at the neck of her blouse, and in a spasmodic clutch tore it wider apart. That voice — she did not know whose it was — but there was no mistaking the cold, sullen fury in it. And the tramping of feet had begun again — and that sound again, the rasp of steel, was hideous now, bringing her a sickening dread.

It was as though for a moment she were too stunned to move. They were fighting out there in Jean's *atelier* — with — with swords. And perhaps — perhaps it was Jean who was fighting. And if — if he should be — no, no! — she dare not even let the thought take form in her mind. But she must see — somehow, she must see! How dark it was, and how those sounds brought terror now! She could not stand there and — and think; she must see that at least it was not Jean, or else — or else she would scream out in her agony of suspense.

She groped out with her hand for the door. She could open it very silently, just a little way — they would be too occupied to notice it. Her hand trembled as it fell upon the knob. She pushed the door open a crack, an inch. There seemed to burst in upon her, in upon the contrasting utter darkness, a blinding light

that dazzled her so that she could see nothing; and to burst in upon her a horrible riot of noise — heavy, panting gasps for breath, the quick shuffle of feet upon the floor, the grating, the ring, the metallic grinding of rapier blades.

In terror, she pushed the door open another inch — and held it rigidly, as, suddenly, her heart seemed to stop its beat. There came a gurgling moan — then — then an instant's deathlike silence — and then, with a wild cry, she flung the door wide open, and, as it crashed back against the wall, she stumbled out into the *atelier*.

She could see now, but it was as though it were not herself at all who looked around the room, for her brain seemed suddenly to be acting in an impersonal, numbed, apathetic way. She could see everything very clearly, but it was as though some one else, not she, were seeing it. She stretched out her arms before her like one who was blind to feel her way, and started across the *atelier*. She should have run, she should have run so fast, so fast, something within her told her she should run, but her limbs seemed scarcely able to support her weight — she could only stumble across the *atelier* with her arms stretched out. That was not Jean who stood in the centre of the room holding a rapier in his hand, it was Paul Valmain. And the man who stood beside Paul Valmain was not Jean. And there were two other men, but neither of them was Jean. But they held a silent, grey-faced, unconscious form in their arms that they were lowering to the floor — and that was Jean. And they looked at her as she came, looked at her in so strange and startled a way; and Paul Valmain took a step toward her, and cried out, and drew suddenly back — and then — and then she was on her knees, and Jean's head was gathered

into her arms, and he was so white, so terribly white, and he made no sound — and — and —

“Jean! Jean!” — she was crying his name passionately, piteously, crying it over and over again. “Jean! Jean!”

And he made no answer — only lay there white and still. And then some one took her arm and tried to draw her away — and some one spoke to her.

“Mademoiselle must permit me,” the voice said gravely. “I am the doctor.”

They took Jean from her, and the man who had said he was the doctor bent over Jean — and, still on her knees, she watched them. Why should they take him from her — now? It could do no one any harm now that she should have Jean, when Jean did not know, when perhaps — she lifted her head quickly, lifted it far back until the white throat and bosom lay bare; until the pure, glorious face, with its wonderful contour, its divinely beautiful lips, tense with outraged grief, looked full into another face that was thrust suddenly before her. It was Paul Valmain who had done this, and he dared to come and stand over her now, and hold in his hand the — why did she not scream out — the blade was red!

“Look! Look!” — his face ashen, Paul Valmain was pointing to the unwrapped figure of the “*Fille du Régiment*.” “The face — the lips!” he whispered hoarsely. “The lips — it is you who are his model! It was you — last night! That hat! That cloak! My God!” he cried out, and the rapier, falling from his hand, clattered upon the floor. “My God, what have I done!”

— VI —

“ JEAN MUST NOT KNOW ”

JEAN'S model! Even in that moment, when it seemed that all else was extraneous, that nothing mattered save that white face, that still form on the floor, the thought brought a strange, troubled amazement — but it was gone almost instantly, as her mind, still refusing to centre on anything but the one great fear that perhaps Jean might die, carried her swiftly back to what was passing around her. She looked again at the doctor as he knelt on the floor and worked with deft fingers over Jean, and something in those grey hairs, in that kindly face, even if it were so grave now, gave her a little courage — surely, surely he would not let Jean die; she looked at the man who, too, was kneeling beside Jean — but he meant nothing to her, she could only wonder why he was there; she looked at Paul Valmain — and shuddered. It was Paul Valmain who had done this, who perhaps had killed Jean — and he was still staring at her in such a fixed, horrible, fascinated way. She rose quickly to her feet, clenching her hands.

And then the doctor, raising his head suddenly, was speaking in quiet tones:

“ I need hardly say that if Monsieur Laparde recovers, we are in honour pledged to secrecy, messieurs. Monsieur Vinailles and I will carry Monsieur Laparde upstairs to his bed, so that clatter-tongued concierge

and his wife will know nothing of this — and to-morrow, if they are told that Monsieur Laparde has met with an accident it will be enough. Monsieur Vinailles and I will attend to everything here; and I would suggest, Monsieur Valmain, that you and Monsieur LeFair withdraw at once. I will send you a report in half an hour.”

Paul Valmain shook his head.

“No,” he said, in a low, shaken voice. “LeFair will go — I remain here.” He pointed suddenly to Marie-Louise. “I must speak to her — alone. Go, LeFair — wait for me at my rooms.”

Marie-Louise drew hurriedly back.

“No, no!” she exclaimed sharply. The man filled her with abhorrence; and now, besides, he was trying to keep her away from Jean — and nothing, nothing in all the world would make her leave Jean’s side now.

But no one seemed to be paying any attention to her — not even Paul Valmain any more, who had turned away, and, whispering as he went, was walking rapidly into the salon with the man they had called LeFair. The doctor had slipped his wrist through the handle of his black bag to leave his hands free, and he and the other man were lifting Jean up in their arms — and then, numbly, as they carried him from the room, she followed.

She saw nothing now only Jean’s face, so ghastly in pallor, with its closed eyes, and with the black hair tumbling over his forehead. It brought a greater fear upon her; but she kept telling herself that she must be brave, for perhaps they would let her help them when they got upstairs, perhaps there would be something that she could do.

They went on through the salon, and out into the hall, and began to mount the stairs — and then some

one, hurrying from the direction of the front door, caught her arm.

“Wait, mademoiselle, wait!” a voice said hoarsely. “Wait — I must speak to you!”

It was Paul Valmain again. She pushed him violently away from her, and, without looking back at him, went on after the others.

On the landing at the head of the stairs, they halted for a moment to open a door, and then for the first time the doctor appeared to notice that she had been following.

“*Pardon*, mademoiselle,” he said a little brusquely. “If mademoiselle will be good enough to wait below!”

They were trying to keep her from Jean again. Every one tried to keep her from Jean. She clenched her hands passionately. But now — now they should not keep her away any longer.

“No!” she cried out fiercely. “You shall not send me away! I will not go — I will not!”

He stared at her for an instant, then shrugged his shoulders.

“Very well, mademoiselle. It is perhaps your privilege. I have not time to question it. But since you remain, perhaps you will be good enough to help us.”

“Yes!” she said eagerly. “Oh, yes! Tell me what to do.”

“Water!” he said tersely. “A basin — cloths!”

With a quick nod of understanding, she ran ahead of them through the door, and hurried on down the hall. She had never been there in Jean’s apartment before, but Madame Mi-mi had not been loath to tell her all about it — and so it was not strange to her, and there was something to do now and that seemed to relieve the dull pain that had been torturing her brain, and she could remember again every little detail that

Madame Mi-mi had described. The sitting-room, the dressing-room, the bedroom, the dining-room, and from the dining-room into the kitchen — it was a complete menage, though Jean used it so little, save to sleep there, and for his *déjeuners* which Madame Mi-mi prepared. She procured the basin, filled it, and hurried back with it — going through the rooms this time instead of the corridor — to where in the bedroom they had placed Jean upon the bed. And then there were the cloths — a sheet would serve best for bandages, and that was kept in the linen closet, where too there were clean towels, Madame Mi-mi had said. She could think very clearly now, and she could be much more brave because there was something to do. She flew to the closet, tore a sheet into strips, gathered up some towels, and returned with them again to the bedroom.

The doctor glanced at her approvingly.

“Thank you, mademoiselle,” he said, in a much more kindly tone. “That will be all for the present.”

But if they were more kindly, his words, they were too a sort of dismissal. She did not know what to do for a moment; and then she went slowly to the foot of the bed and knelt down — she would be out of their way there, and ready in an instant if the doctor called again. She would have given so much to help him in the intimate way this Monsieur Vinailles was helping, to hold Jean, to touch Jean, but — but they seemed so occupied, both of them, and — and she must not interfere. She could only watch, while the agony of suspense crept upon her again; watch the grey-haired man, in his shirt sleeves now, working so quickly, so silently — and then suddenly she turned away her head, and her heart sank with dread. It was so terrible a wound that she had caught sight of in Jean’s side, as the doctor

straightened up for an instant! It — it did not seem that any one could live with — with that. And Jean lay so still, so motionless, and in his unconsciousness seemed so much like — like dead. She shivered a little, and fought back the tears, and tried resolutely to think of something else — of anything — of how beautifully Madame Mi-mi had told her Jean's rooms here were furnished.

She forced herself to look around her. Yes, yes, it was as Madame Mi-mi had said — the carpet seemed to shine as though it were of silk; and the bed was very large and made of brass, which was something she had never seen before; and in all the rooms, as she had passed through them, she had been conscious that everything was very magnificent, just as the salon downstairs was very magnificent. And here on that big, carved dresser were wonderful candlesticks like those Father Anton used to have at the altar in Bernay-sur-Mer, only these were perhaps real silver, just as Father Anton had said that some day, when the parish grew very rich, theirs would be instead of only looking like it, and — she turned quickly back again toward the bed. Monsieur Vinailles and the doctor were speaking.

“But what would you have!” Monsieur Vinailles was exclaiming in a low voice. “I know no more than you what it was about — and neither does LeFair. We tried to bring about an understanding, LeFair and I, before we called for you, or at least get them to consent to a delay in which their tempers might cool; but neither Valmain nor Jean would listen to us. Not a word! If LeFair and I would not act for them, they would get some one else. *Voilà tout!* What would you have!”

“H'm!” returned the doctor gruffly. “Well, then,

Vinailles, as I shall not need you any more for the moment, I think you had better go and tell Monsieur Bliss what has happened."

"*Sacré* — no!" ejaculated Vinailles. "I prefer some one else should do that! And besides, I do not think that he has returned to Paris yet."

"Then Mademoiselle Bliss," insisted the doctor quietly. "It is all one! They are Jean's family, as it were, are they not — eh? And then is not Mademoiselle Bliss as good as his fiancée? Well? I consider that she, or Monsieur Bliss, or both of them, should know."

"You mean," said Vinailles, in a startled tone, "that Jean is —"

"I mean nothing!" answered the doctor bluntly. "He is a long time unconscious, and he is not responding well to stimulants, that is all. On the other hand, you need not unnecessarily alarm any one; if I get him through the next hour or so, and no septic complications set in later on, we'll have him on his feet in a few days. If you take Jean's car you should be back in fifteen or twenty minutes. Go at once, Vinailles."

"Very well," Vinailles agreed a little reluctantly — and left the room.

What did the doctor mean? Marie-Louise crept timidly around to the opposite side of the bed where she could watch his face, and where she could see Jean's face too. What did the doctor mean? If — if everything went right, Jean would be well in a few days, but — but he was in danger now. She questioned the grave face piteously with her eyes — but received no response. The doctor was bending over Jean, and did not look up.

The minutes passed, ten, fifteen perhaps, as she knelt there — and then it seemed that she could not endure

it any longer, and that all her self-restraint was at an end.

“Jean!” she whispered — and because they were stronger than she, and because she could keep them back no longer, the tears came in a flood, and she reached out and caught Jean’s hand that was outstretched on the bed, and held it between both her own, and buried her face between her own two arms.

She felt the doctor’s hand laid gently on her shoulder.

“Do not give way, mademoiselle,” he said soothingly. “Courage! We shall win, I promise you.”

She grew quieter after a little while — and again she tried to think. They had sent for Mademoiselle Bliss, and very soon mademoiselle would be here. It was the mademoiselle who had spoken to her so sharply that day because she had not put on her shoes and stockings. . . . Hector had said that Mademoiselle Bliss and Jean were to marry . . . and — and that was what the doctor had just said to Monsieur Vinailles . . . and — and so it was true. And what then? What — if Mademoiselle Bliss found her here? She would do Mademoiselle Bliss no harm to stay here! Her hands closed tighter over the one in her grasp. How cold Jean’s hand was! What would she do — what would she do? She did not want to go, it seemed so hard to go, and it was so little to ask, so little out of all her life, just to stay there and kneel beside Jean and hold his hand, and — she raised her head, quickly, suddenly. The hand in hers twitched a little, there came a half moan, half gasp, and then Jean’s voice, mumbling, wandering, reached her.

“Gaston, see, we are back! Put your arms around my neck, *mon brave*, and I will lift you up, and —”

The words grew thick upon his tongue, lost their coherence, and died away. And then he began to speak again, and Marie-Louise leaned closer to catch the words. “See, it is a beacon — and it is for you, Marie-Louise, because it is you . . . *sacré nom*, why do you say that? . . . I can make a thousand . . . has it not those lips that I could fashion even in the dark . . . a thousand, I tell you . . . how — not another, when —”

“*Tiens!*” exclaimed the doctor briskly. “That is good! He is regaining consciousness now, and — heh! — but what is the matter, mademoiselle?”

With a startled little cry, Marie-Louise was on her feet. She was vaguely conscious that, while they seemed to call up all her life, all the old life of Bernay-sur-Mer, her life and Jean’s when they had been together, Jean’s words too held some strange relation to something that had just happened here that night, some strange, puzzling, bewildering significance — and that then all this seemed swept away from her on the instant before a still greater significance in the doctor’s words. What had the doctor said — that Jean was returning to consciousness! It brought joy and gladness and hope surging over her; but it brought too something cruel and hard and cold, as though a sentence had been pronounced upon her. She must go now, whether she wanted to or not. Jean must not see her. It was not Mademoiselle Bliss she had to consider now — it was Jean. He must not see her — he must not even know that she had been there. He must not, he must not see her — he must not know! And then a sort of panic fear seized her, and she ran around the bed to the doctor’s side.

“Monsieur, monsieur, I must go!” she cried agi-

tatedly. "And he must not know — he must not know that I — that — that any one has been here. Monsieur, will — will you promise that?"

"But, mademoiselle!" — he looked at her in amazement. "But, mademoiselle, I —"

She caught his hands wildly, and dropped upon her knees.

"See, monsieur, see, I beg it of you!" she pleaded almost hysterically. "It is not much to ask — that you will not tell. Promise me, monsieur, promise me! Why should he know, why should any one know? I have done no harm! And it — it is for his sake that I ask it. Monsieur, monsieur, you will promise!"

"I see no reason now why I should say anything," he answered gravely; "but if I promise it must be with a reservation. I will promise you, mademoiselle, that unless circumstances leave me no choice I will say nothing." Then, quickly, as he leaned toward the bed: "But if he is not to see you, you must go at once!"

"Yes!" she breathed. "Yes! You are good, monsieur — you are very, very good. And — and Monsieur Vinailles, and Mademoiselle Bliss, if Monsieur Vinailles should have told her — you will not let them tell Jean any one was here?"

"I will speak to them," he said quietly. "But go then, mademoiselle, immediately!"

"And — and, monsieur" — her voice breaking — "Jean will not — not die?"

"No, mademoiselle, he will not die, I think I can promise that now without any reservation," he replied with a smile. "But, *ma foi*, if he is not to know — eh!"

She stole a half frightened, half wistful glance toward the bed — then ran from the room and out into the hall.

“He must not know! He must not know!”—she kept saying that to herself; repeating it again and again, as she went slowly down the stairs. It seemed as though those were the words that summed up her life, that she had been saying them in her soul ever since the day those strangers had come to Bernay-sur-Mer. “Jean must not know!”

She halted suddenly on the lower step, and her face whitened a little. Paul Valmain was standing in the doorway of the salon. He was still here then, this Paul Valmain, the man who—who had tried to kill Jean!

“Mademoiselle!” he cried out. “See, I am still waiting! I must speak to you—here—in the salon—in the *atelier* for a moment!”

It seemed that she must run from him, that she abhorred him—and yet—and yet—“Jean must not know!” She must get Paul Valmain to promise too—Paul Valmain, and that other man who had been with him.

“Mademoiselle!” he said again. “I—”

“Yes,” she said—and stepped past him through the salon door.

— VII —

MEA CULPA

THE man frightened her. He had caught her arm the moment she had entered the salon, and had hurried her roughly across the room and into the *atelier*; and, besides, his face was ghastly it was so colourless, and it kept twitching, and his eyes burned with such an unnatural light.

“My arm, monsieur!” she cried out. “You are hurting me!”

He laughed at her in a hollow way, and only tightened his hold, as he pulled her in front of the clay figure of the “*Fille du Régiment*.”

“Stand so!” he burst out. “With your head — so! As you were when you came from that dressing room! So — so!” — he pushed her chin up, and grasped her by the shoulders.

“Monsieur!” she cried out again, and struggled to free herself. “Monsieur, what are you doing?”

“Wait, I tell you!” he almost shouted.

Frightened before, she was terrified now, and besides she hated the man with all her strength, and her soul shrank from him because it was he who had so nearly killed Jean; but she had come to plead with him, she must not forget that, only — only he was acting so strangely. And then suddenly, startling her, she remembered that it was he who had said she was Jean’s model. That was why he was staring so wildly

first at her and then at the face of the girl with the drum, and back at her again, and then at the clay figure.

“It is so!” he said hoarsely. “It is so! But wait — wait!” His hands dropped from her shoulders, and he ran from one figure to another about the studio, pausing before each one to gaze at it fixedly and intently. “The lips — always the lips — always your lips — the wonderful, inscrutable lips that all France is forever raving about!” — the words came in sharp, broken snatches. “Never the face in its entirety, but always the lips — and always with the lips some additional feature, the forehead, or the poise, or the eyes — always you!”

At first she followed the man with her eyes in a sort of incredulous, fearsome wonder; and then slowly, seemingly without volition of her own, drawn to it as by a magnet, she turned to face and stare at the figure of the “*Fille du Régiment*.” Was it true, could it be true that it was she, her lips that Jean had made there in those lips of clay? Was that what that strange sense of familiarity had meant, and which she had not understood? No, no — Jean had forgotten, forgotten long ago! It was not true, it was not possible! And yet — and yet they *were* her lips — her eyes would not lie to her. And this then was what had seemed to give a significance, that she could not explain at the time, to those words of Jean’s of a little while ago. This man Paul Valmain had said she was Jean’s model before she went upstairs, and then Jean had talked about the beacon. “It is a beacon — and it is for you, Marie-Louise, because it is you . . . has it not those lips that I could fashion even in the dark?” he had said. She had not been able to connect the two things then; but now — now she knew. Jean’s model

— all through those two years she had been Jean's model! And yet how could it be possible! The very thought seemed to leave her abashed — it — it seemed as though she were committing a sacrilege to let herself imagine that she, who was only Marie-Louise Bernier, a fishergirl of Bernay-sur-Mer, was the model for Jean's beautiful work that made all the great people of France so proud to call him one of themselves! It was not strange that she had failed to understand what that sense of familiarity in the clay faces had meant — she would never, never have dared to think of such a thing by herself — and it would have been so far away, that thought, that of itself it would never have come. Why was she suddenly so weak now, as though a wondrous joy, so great that it overwhelmed her, was surging upon her — and why was that cold fear, that seemed to tell the joy that it was trespassing where it had no place, stirring within her? What did this thing mean for her — that those lips of clay were hers! It brought so much, so many different emotions, and each of them was so overpowering in itself, and they all came crowding so upon her at once, that it seemed she must cry out in her cruel bewilderment.

And then Paul Valmain was standing before her again.

“So!” — he flung out his arms. “So — it is out at last, the secret! He has kept you well under cover, mademoiselle!”

The words came to her with a shock, rousing her from her thoughts. He did not understand. He must not think that Jean knew; because that was why she was there now — to tell him that Jean must not know.

“No!” she said quickly. “No, no, monsieur! And, oh, monsieur, you must not let — let Jean know that I was here to-night. It — it is some mistake about

—about the model, monsieur. He has not seen me since he has been in Paris, and —”

“What!” he broke in harshly. “You deny that you have been coming here?”

“Only last night, monsieur,” she said eagerly. “Only last night for the first time.”

“It is well that you admit at least that!” he jeered, in a sort of furious irony. “I congratulate you, mademoiselle! My profound respects! In a single visit then you have accomplished wonders, even with so beautiful a face and figure! You have made Jean Laparde famous all over the world; and you have made me perhaps — a murderer!”

She stared at him wide-eyed. What did he mean?

“But, monsieur — monsieur — I swear it to you!” she stammered. “It was only last night for the first time.”

He laughed mirthlessly, and shrugged his shoulders.

“As you will, mademoiselle! A night or a thousand spent with Monsieur Laparde, it is all one to me! It is your own affair! But” — his voice rose suddenly in uncontrollable passion — “but, *sacré nom de Dieu*, there is something that is my affair! That cloak! That hat! Where did you get them?” He was clutching with one hand at the garment, pulling at it with vicious twitches to emphasise his words.

She drew back from him, the blood hot and burning in her cheeks. A night or a thousand with Jean! He thought — he thought — *that!* And he talked of her hat and cloak! What did they matter, what did anything matter, except that — that shameful thought of his that stabbed at her, and, with its sudden pain, brought a horrible giddiness and a horrible ringing in her ears?

“Answer me!” he cried fiercely. “Why are you

wearing those things now? Where did you get them? Why were you masquerading last night in that hat and cloak, that belong to Mademoiselle Bliss, when I saw you enter here?"

"Mademoiselle Bliss!"—she could only repeat the words numbly. "It is her hat and coat?" The room seemed to swim around her. She put her hands to her eyes. A new terror was creeping upon her. The hat and cloak belonged to Mademoiselle Bliss! Vaguely, dimly, understanding began to come. He had thought that she was Mademoiselle Bliss, and because of that—no, no! The *bon Dieu* would not let her suffer that too! It was so terrible—everything was so terrible this night—there could not be anything more, for it was already beyond what she could bear. She stretched out her hands to him imploringly. "It—it is not because you thought that I was Mademoiselle Bliss"—she was pleading piteously for a denial—"that—that you—that it is because of me you fought with Jean, and that Jean is—is—"

"Are you trying to play with me?" he rasped out savagely. "What else but that? You were here all night last night. Yes, I thought you were Mademoiselle Bliss! Yes, it was because of that I would have killed Monsieur Laparde! Is that plain enough, mademoiselle? And now will you answer me? Where did you get those things, and for what hellish reason were you wearing them? Answer me, I tell you!" He caught her, and shook her violently. "Answer me!" he fumed.

"Yes, answer him!" came a mocking voice suddenly from the archway of the salon.

With a cry, Marie-Louise tore herself away—and, swaying, stared wildly across the room. It was made-

moiselle! It was Mademoiselle Bliss standing there between the portières!

A low laugh rippled through the *atelier* — unmusically, because it held a jarring, ominous note; and then Myrna Bliss was speaking again.

“Monsieur Vinailles told me that some girl here had made quite a *coup de théâtre*,” she said calmly — too calmly to be natural. She fixed her grey eyes, narrowed a little now, on Marie-Louise. “I had no idea that it was *you*. How astounding!” She swung toward Paul Valmain. “Yes; Monsieur Valmain, I have been listening behind the portières. From the hall door, when I entered the house with Monsieur Vinailles a few moments ago, I caught sight of mademoiselle and yourself across the salon, thanks to the half open portières; and — mademoiselle, there, will perhaps understand this better than you — in spite of my anxiety for Jean, I sent Monsieur Vinailles upstairs alone. Do I make it plain, Monsieur Valmain, that I overheard your last remarks?”

Marie-Louise glanced distractedly from one to the other. Mademoiselle Bliss was smiling — only it was a very strange smile. Why was she smiling like that? And Monsieur Valmain’s face was twitching again, only it seemed that, where there had been anger before, there was now a curious mingling of confusion and passionate eagerness.

“Then,” he said, and took a step forward, “then —”

“Then,” Myrna Bliss interrupted evenly, and came slowly across the *atelier*, “then, of course, I understand everything, Monsieur Valmain. And I suppose I should feel flattered that you should take it upon yourself to avenge” — her voice was rising now, and the

grey eyes were flashing dangerously — “to avenge my honour! How like a knight of old, Monsieur Valmain! How heroic! I have heard that Monsieur Valmain is one of the finest swordsmen in France; I have never heard that Monsieur Laparde was an adept at the art, but that, indeed, he was almost ignorant of it, and —”

“Mademoiselle!” he exclaimed hoarsely. “Mademoiselle — Myrna! You have no right to say that! It is not true!” He drew himself up, clenching his hands. “By God, not even you shall say that to me, to Paul Valmain! I offered — no, I insisted that we should fight with pistols. Laparde would not hear of it — they would make too much noise.”

“Ah — a noise!” she said colourlessly. “And what then, Monsieur Valmain? Have you any other excuse for what you have done?”

“You know why I did it, if you have been listening!” he cried out. “You know why! You know that it was because I loved you — that I love you! That my soul was in hell with what I believed to be true!”

It seemed to Marie-Louise that she was living through some terrible, horrible dream. She reached out behind her, groping for the modelling platform, and sank down upon it. Mademoiselle’s laugh was echoing through the room again, and there was something — something so menacing in it that it made her shudder.

“Love!” — Myrna Bliss was quivering with passion, as she stepped fiercely toward Paul Valmain. “Love! If I were a man, I would kill you for that kind of love! I would kill you! You beast! You dared to think — to think that I had come here in the middle of the night alone, to — to spend the night

here! You dared to think that of me! That — that I was —”

“Myrna! Mademoiselle!” — his hands went out to her. His face was ghastly white. “Wait! For God’s sake — wait! You do not understand!” He whirled around and pointed to Marie-Louise. “Look at her! Look! It is your cloak — your hat! It was dark across the street. She was wearing your hat and cloak!”

“I heard you say all that before!” she retorted instantly. “I do not care what she was wearing! I do not care what she looked like! You dared to think that it was me! You dared to hold me as little better than a woman of the streets! You dared to do that — you despicable hound!” Her fingers were opening and shutting spasmodically. “I hate you! I loathe you! I would strangle you for it, if I were strong enough!”

He shrank back from her, his lips working.

“You are merciless!” he said in a choked way. “You — you do not understand. You — you do not understand what helped to make me — to — why I came to be there last night. It was the key of that door there, the key of the door to the salon, the afternoon after the reception.”

Myrna Bliss appeared to control herself with an effort.

“The key!” — there was well-simulated bewilderment in the quick, angry exclamation.

“When we came in,” he said hurriedly. “Laparde, who was acting strangely, had just unlocked the door, and he was still holding the key in his hand without knowing it.”

It was a moment before she spoke — while her eyes swept him scornfully from head to foot.

“ I wish Jean had killed you ! ” — her lips were just parted over her clenched teeth. “ So — you have the temerity to add another insult to the first ! That Jean and I were together in a locked room ! I remember the key now. And so Jean was acting strangely ! It was to be a little surprise party for Jean — was it not ? Is it strange if he were surprised then ? When he heard all of you coming, laughing and talking and tramping up the stairs, he ran to the door to open it, and I remember now that the key fell out of the lock and to the floor, and that he picked it up. How amazing that perhaps he held it in his hand, Monsieur Valmain ! And do you imagine, Monsieur Valmain, that it was an opportune time for me, who not only knew you were coming, but who had arranged the affair, to indulge in the amours that your vilely fertile mind — ”

“ Stop, mademoiselle ! ” he cried wildly. “ I was mad — mad with my love for you. I understand too well now ! I understood that I had made a terrible mistake, *misérable* that I am, when this girl, when it was too late, came out of that dressing room there, when — when Laparde had fallen. I am a fool, a blind, senseless fool ; but — but, mademoiselle, it was my love — you will forgive, you — ”

“ Besides a fool, you are a coward ! ” she said pitilessly. “ But you do not understand everything yet — and you shall have no further chance to warp and twist things to suit your perverted fancy, Monsieur Valmain. I think I could quite easily tell you where this girl, in whom you imagine you have discovered Jean’s model, obtained those clothes — and if she will not tell you, I will. And then you will leave here, and you will take pains, Monsieur Valmain, that we do not meet again. Do you hear that ? I tell you again

that I hate you, that I loathe you, and that if I were a man I would know how to make you answer for it!" She stepped quickly to Marie-Louise's side. "Look up at me!" she ordered curtly. "This man says that hat and cloak are mine, and it is true — they were mine. Tell him where you got them!"

Marie-Louise did not move, except that she clasped her hands together a little more tightly in her lap. She could not tell; for suddenly she thought of Father Anton, and a sense of loyalty to Father Anton insisted that she should not tell. If mademoiselle knew, as mademoiselle said, that was another matter, and she could not change that now; but to tell it herself — no, she could not do that, for that was to admit that the good curé was in the secret of her presence in Paris, and after that it would be known almost surely that he had arranged with Hector and Madame Mi-mi for her to come there to the *atelier*.

"Well?" prompted Myrna Bliss, sharply.

Marie-Louise shook her head.

Myrna Bliss stamped her foot angrily.

"Are you stupid enough to imagine that you are protecting Father Anton? I promise you I shall have a word with that gentleman in the morning! And since you could have got that hat and cloak nowhere else, tell Monsieur Valmain that Father Anton gave them to you, and have done with it!"

Marie-Louise looked up. Mademoiselle had said it, and — and Father Anton certainly would not deny it.

"Yes," she said under her breath. "Father Anton gave them to me."

"Well, why didn't you say so at first?" snapped Myrna. She turned again furiously on Paul Valmain. "You hear, Monsieur Valmain! You are well ac-

quainted with Father Anton. Go to him, if you have any doubts. You have only to know now how Father Anton obtained them"—her words were curling, biting, stinging like a whiplash in their bitter scorn. "Well, listen! I and a few of my friends have become *charitable* since father established his fund. It is contagious, Monsieur Valmain! We, too, give bounteously to Father Anton for distribution amongst the poor—we give our discarded garments! I sent him that hat and cloak in a bundle with some other things, a few days ago. Is it quite plain, Monsieur Valmain? Are you satisfied? Well, then"—she swung an outstretched arm toward the door—"go!"

"But, mademoiselle — *pour l'amour de Dieu!*" he protested brokenly. "Do you not see that I am in agony, in torment for what I have done, that—"

"Go!" she raged—and stamped with her foot upon the floor again.

For a moment he stood lurching a little on his feet, as though he had been struck a blow; and then, white-faced, he drew himself up and bowed to her.

"As you will, mademoiselle!" he said in a low voice, and walked past her toward the door.

Myrna Bliss turned to watch him—and halfway across the room halted him.

"Wait!"—she pointed to the rapiers lying on the floor. "Take those things with you! And one word more, Monsieur Valmain! I do not intend to pose in Paris in the abandoned rôle you were so quick to cast me for. You perhaps understand that! I do not propose that anything shall be known of what has happened here to-night. I shall see to it that nothing is said by the others, but a word of this from you, Monsieur Valmain, or from Monsieur LeFair, who

Monsieur Vinailles tells me was acting as your second, and —”

“Mademoiselle might have spared me that!” he said monotonously — and, picking up the rapiers, walked on through the salon and out into the hall.

In a sort of miserably fascinated way Marie-Louise had followed him with her eyes. She heard the outer door close behind him — and then mechanically she rose to her feet, as Myrna Bliss came and stood before her.

“So” — Myrna’s voice was quivering, tense with passion — “so it remained for Monsieur Valmain to discover the secret of the wonderful, beautiful, entrancing model! Monsieur Valmain is right, of course. I knew it at once, the moment I heard him say so. I was not very clever, I suppose, or I should have seen it for myself long ago; only — you quite understand this of course — I had forgotten, utterly forgotten, that you even existed! But it seems that Jean could not live without his little peasant; nor the little peasant without Jean! It is perfectly comprehensible now why there should have been such secrecy about his model. And so you have been living with Jean, have you, ever since he came to Paris? The naïve, innocent little *ingénue* of Bernay-sur-Mer!”

And then Marie-Louise lifted her head high again, and, while the hot flushes came and swept her face, the great dark eyes held steadily on the grey ones that were hard and cold like steel. It was not mademoiselle of the *grand monde* before her any more; it was a woman whose tongue was making a sacrilege of all that was holy and cherished in her life, making a hideous mockery of her love that was so sacred and pure to her, making it a foul thing, smirching it, defiling it — it was not

Mademoiselle Bliss of another world than hers whom she approached with diffidence and awe; it was a woman taunting her with a shame from which her soul recoiled, and there came surging upon her, born of the primitive, elemental life that had been hers, the days upon the oars, the nights of rugged battling with the storms, a fury that was physical in its cry for expression.

“It is not true! It is not true!” she panted — and, her hands clenched tightly, raised as though to strike, she took a quick step forward.

Startled, Myrna Bliss involuntarily sprang back — but the next instant she was laughing threateningly.

“You little spitfire!” she exclaimed angrily. “And so it is not true! Look at that statue behind you, look at any in this room, at any Jean has ever done since he has been in Paris, and — oh, yes, I see it quite plainly myself, now that I have been shown — it is you, you everywhere! And you have the brazenness, the impudence to say that you have not been living with Jean, that you have not been coming here at all hours of the night for the last two years — as you have to-night — as you did last night! Bah, you pitiful little hypocrite, would any one believe you?”

“Yes, they would believe me!” Marie-Louise cried passionately. “And *you* will believe me! I will make you believe me! I will make you! I will make you! I —” Her voice broke suddenly, and with a half sob she dropped her hands to her sides. Her fury had gone and in its place had come only a desperate earnestness to make mademoiselle believe. She had been thinking of herself alone — and there was Jean! If mademoiselle would not believe her, the shame would be Jean’s too, and the guilt that mademoiselle imagined would be Jean’s guilt too. And even if she must tell



" . . . IT IS YOU, YOU EVERYWHERE! AND YOU HAVE THE BRAZENNESS
TO SAY THAT YOU HAVE NOT BEEN COMING HERE . . . "

all about Father Anton bringing her to Hector and Madame Mi-mi, she must make mademoiselle believe. "Mademoiselle" — she was pleading now, her voice choking as she spoke — "mademoiselle, see — listen! You must — you must believe! It is true, every word I have said is true! And it is true that I love Jean, and that that is why I came, but — but Jean has never seen me since that day he left Bernay-sur-Mer. See, mademoiselle — listen! It is only a few days since I came to Paris — see, mademoiselle, even this hat and cloak proves it. I did not know that it was cold, that one needed such things in Paris, and I had nothing except just the clothes I had worn in Bernay-sur-Mer, and the night I came I went to Father Anton and he gave the hat and cloak to me — but I did not know, mademoiselle, that they had been yours. I wanted to see Jean again, not to let him know that I was here, but only to see him, only to see his work. It was two years, mademoiselle, two years — and Father Anton understood, only he made me promise, mademoiselle, that I would not speak to Jean, that I would not let Jean know that I was here. Listen — listen, mademoiselle!" Marie-Louise's hands were raised again — but entreatingly now. "It was only to see Jean again, and see his work, and then I was going away. For nothing, for nothing in the world would I let Jean know that I had come. And so — and so, mademoiselle, so Father Anton arranged with Hector that I should do the work about the salon and the *atelier*, but very early in the mornings before Jean was up; and then because I came so early Hector gave me the key — and last night — oh, mademoiselle, mademoiselle, can you not understand? — I came here, and — and I came again to-night. See, mademoiselle — it is so easy to believe! You do believe! Father Anton will tell

you that it is all true, and that I have been in Bernay-sur-Mer all this time. Mademoiselle, mademoiselle — you do believe! ”

Myrna Bliss was staring at Marie-Louise in startled amazement.

“ You mean — you mean,” she said, in a low, tense way; “ you mean that Jean knows nothing of this — that he does not know that you are even in Paris, that he has not seen you since he left Bernay-sur-Mer? ”

“ But, yes; yes, yes, yes, mademoiselle, it is so, all that — it is so! ” Marie-Louise answered feverishly. “ And — and he must not know now, mademoiselle — he must not know now.”

And then Myrna Bliss smiled ironically.

“ I will see to that! ” she said grimly. “ You need have no fear on that score, if what you say is true! ” She turned abruptly from Marie-Louise, walked straight to the “ *Fille du Régiment*,” and gazed at it for a moment. Then, scarcely aloud: “ ‘ The womanhood of France,’ he had said . . . ‘ The model in his heart.’ ” And so Jean did not know! Well, if that were so, she would take very good care that he never did know! It seemed incredible, but the girl’s sincerity was not to be denied. She laughed out sharply, and wheeled back upon Marie-Louise. “ Well, and what now? ” she said coldly; and then, thrusting quickly: “ Are you aware that I am to marry Monsieur Laparde? ”

Marie-Louise’s face blanched.

“ Yes,” she said faintly.

“ And so ” — the scathing tones were back in Myrna’s voice — “ and so you were just playing with fire! Well, are you satisfied with what you have done? If Jean Laparde lives it will be no thanks to you; if he dies it will be you who — ”

Marie-Louise put out her hands as though to ward off a blow. She was swaying upon her feet.

“Not that — not that, mademoiselle!” — she could scarcely force the words to her lips. “Do not say it, mademoiselle! I know that it is true — God in his infinite pity, have pity on me! — but do not say it! I will go away, mademoiselle — I will go away — for always. I will wait only to know that — that Jean is well, for the *bon Dieu* will not let him die — and then — and then I will go — and then I —” A great sob shook her frame, and covering her face with her hands she sank down again upon the modelling platform.

She was conscious that Mademoiselle Bliss was standing there, that the grey eyes were fixed upon her; and then that from the salon some one called to mademoiselle — but she did not hear mademoiselle go, only when she looked up again she was alone in the *atelier*. And it was very kind of mademoiselle to go so softly, and to say no more.

She rose slowly to her feet, and passed through the *atelier*, and through the salon, and out into the hall, and to the stairs — and paused there to listen with pitiful eagerness. But there was no sound from above — there was only the voice of her soul that kept whispering so cruelly, “it is you . . . it is you . . . it is you . . . it is not Paul Valmain who has done this . . . it is you . . . it is you.”

And there at the foot of the stairs she knelt down for a moment; then rose, and crossed the hall slowly to the door, and opened it — and walked blindly out.

— VIII —

FLIGHT

MADAME GARNEAU'S hair straggled untidily about her head, her hands were red, calloused, inclined indeed to be grimy, she had passed even that poets'-consolation-prize age of forty, and she had no figure; but Madame Garneau was possessed of a heart. She pushed open the door of Marie-Louise's room, and dangled in her hand a yellow paper bag that was grease specked on the bottom.

"*Voilà*, my little lodger!" she cried gaily. "I have this for you, and you will never guess what it is; and, besides, I have something else — a message for you from Father Anton. Now which will you have first?"

Marie-Louise, from her chair by the window, rose quickly to her feet, with a little exclamation of pleased surprise.

Madame Garneau immediately pushed her back into the chair.

"But you are to remain quiet — eh, *ma petite*!" She wagged her finger severely in front of Marie-Louise's nose. "Now sit still, or you shall have neither one nor the other!"

"What nonsense!" laughed Marie-Louise, as she stood up once more. "I am quite well again — and I am even to go out this morning."

The paper bag banged belligerently on Madame Garneau's hip, as she placed her arms akimbo.

“You are to go out! And who said you are to go out?”

“But, who else — the doctor,” Marie-Louise answered with a smile.

“Ah, the doctor!” sniffed Madame Garneau disdainfully. “I have my opinion of doctors! In two or three days it will be time enough!” She wagged her forefinger again, and held up the bag. “Eh, *bien* — can you guess?”

“Never!” admitted Marie-Louise, shaking her head prettily.

“Cream-puffs!” announced Madame Garneau triumphantly. It was perhaps the most indigestible edible with which she could have outraged a diet list, but in that quarter of Paris, where *sous* were scarce, cream-puffs were the delicacy *par excellence*, and therefore a delicacy for all occasions, rare enough in any event, when they could be obtained. And besides, as Madame Garneau had said, she had her opinion of doctors — Madame Garneau, even if unconsciously so, was consistent! “Cream-puffs, *ma petite*! From the *patisserie* around the corner — I sent the gamin, who brought the message from Father Anton, for them. And now what do you say?”

Marie-Louise had neither heart nor appetite for cream-puffs, but she must needs peek excitedly in through the top of the bag, and thank Madame Garneau effusively, while she protested earnestly at the extravagance.

“It is nothing!” declared Madame Garneau, her honest face flushed with pleasure. She placed the bag on the foot of the bed. “It is nothing — *ma foi*! And now about Father Anton. He was to have come this afternoon, eh?”

“Yes,” said Marie-Louise.

"Well, then," said Madame Garneau, "he is not coming."

"Not coming!"

"It is his poor!" Madame Garneau exclaimed tartly. "Your Father Anton has no sense! I would teach him a lesson if I had anything to do with him! Fancy! The idea! And at his age! He will kill himself! The gamin's mother was sick, and Father Anton must sit up the night, and stay there all this day! And it is not once, but all the time he does that! Bah, I have no patience with him! His heart is too soft! It is well for his poor that I am not Father Anton!" There was finality in the shrug of Madame Garneau's shoulders. She glanced at Marie-Louise, and then her eyes fell upon the paper bag. "Oh, I forgot to tell you!" she said anxiously. "There is a cream-puff gone from the quarter-dozen. I gave one to the gamin, he made such eyes at the bag." She tucked in a refractory wisp of hair that was straying over her ear. "Well, then, as I was saying, he is not coming this afternoon, but he will come this evening; and he said you were not to worry at all, because what he was talking to you about yesterday — whatever that is! — is all arranged."

All arranged! It came as a sudden shock. Marie-Louise turned her head quickly away, and, with her back to Madame Garneau, stood looking out of the window. All arranged! Then what should she do — what should she do? She put her hands wearily to her eyes.

"*Mais, là, là!*" soothed Madame Garneau. "You must not be disappointed. It is only for a few hours. He will come this evening."

Marie-Louise forced a laugh.

"But I am not disappointed," she answered. "I

do not mind at all." She was still staring down into the street. If Madame Garneau would only go so that she could think what to do, and — no! She knew what she must do, she had thought it all out before; it was only that the moment when she must act upon her decision was thrust so suddenly upon her. "Oh, Madame Garneau, I was almost forgetting!" she cried — and, turning from the window, ran to the dilapidated and wobbly bureau, pulled open a drawer, and took out her purse. "It is a week since I have paid for my room — a week to-day, isn't it?"

Madame Garneau promptly retreated toward the door.

"*Mais, non! Mais, non!*" she protested "When one is sick, one does not earn the *sous*! Next week, the week after, when you are at work again, you shall —"

Marie-Louise laughingly caught Madame Garneau's hand, and began to count the franc pieces into it; while Madame Garneau, still protesting, kept up her retreat for the door.

"There!" — Marie-Louise triumphantly closed the other's fingers over the money.

"But, no!" Madame Garneau expostulated vigorously. "But I will not hear of it! What do you imagine! I —"

And then Marie-Louise pushed the other playfully through the door, and closed the door, and placed her back against it, and laughed as she heard Madame Garneau grumbling outside and finally go grumbling away — but the laugh was all for Madame Garneau. When she could no longer hear Madame Garneau, she clasped her hands tightly to her bosom, and caught her breath. That was done! She had both paid and got Madame Garneau from the room.

She stood still by the door, her shoulders drooped; her hands dropped to her sides, and her fingers began to pluck nervously at the folds of her dress, as she stared unseeingly before her. Father Anton had it all arranged — the words brought so much, meant so much, and seemed to embody in themselves all that had happened in the week that had passed since the night when Jean and Monsieur Valmain had fought in the studio. She had wandered blindly and like one dazed all the rest of that night through the streets of Paris; and it must only have been the *bon Dieu* who had led her at last to where, lying unconscious on the floor outside the door of his room, Father Anton had found her in the morning. And then — how good they had all been to her! — Father Anton, and Madame Garneau, and Doctor Maurier, the grey-haired, kindly doctor who had been with Jean that night, and who would take not a *sou* for his visits to her, but only fill the room with sunshine through his good news of Jean.

She remembered that she had asked Father Anton for Jean's doctor because then she would always have word of Jean — and she remembered Father Anton's dismay at the request. "But, Marie-Louise," Father Anton had said anxiously, "you do not know what you are asking! He is the most famous man in Paris, and —" "And he will come," she had told Father Anton. And she had been right, for Doctor Maurier had come; and so each day she had had news of Jean, and now Jean was so well that he was walking about the studio again.

But most of all how good Father Anton had been! She had told him all — everything — and he had not been angry with her; though she knew, from little things he had said inadvertently, that Mademoiselle Bliss had been very angry with him. Dear old Father

Anton! He had tried to take all the blame upon himself, because he said he had been deceitful — though she could not understand that, no matter how hard he tried to make her believe it, for he had only helped her to see Jean and to be near Jean, and that was what she herself had pleaded with him to do.

And then, as she had grown stronger and had begun to talk of going away, Father Anton had agreed with her, but he had insisted that she should go back to Bernay-sur-Mer. And he had become so earnest and determined that it must be Bernay-sur-Mer, and because she knew that it was his love for her that made him so anxious about her future, she could not bring herself to tell him what she really meant to do, what, in the long hours through the nights as she had lain awake, she had made up her mind to do — to go somewhere, she did not know where, but somewhere far away where there would be nothing to remind her of Jean — not that she could forget, no matter where she went, but that scenes and associations, as they had done in the past two years, might not again prove too strong for her. And so, rather than pain Father Anton by an absolute refusal, or the admission that even he was to go out of her life, she had told him only that she did not want to go back to Bernay-sur-Mer, that her house was sold, and that every one there would think it very strange that she had gone away like that only to return again so soon.

But he was not to be shaken in his determination. "Ah, even if that were true," Father Anton had said to her only yesterday, "nevertheless, my little Marie-Louise, it is the thing you must do. I cannot let you do anything else; and in a little while — who knows! — you will be very happy there again. But it is not true, for there is a way that I have been thinking about

as I came here. As for the house, it is as well that it is sold; you have the money, and besides it is much better that you should not live there alone — you will live for a while with those honest Fregeaus, who will be overjoyed. And as for the rest — see, Marie-Louise, this is what we will do! I will speak to Monsieur Bliss and tell him that I wish to go back for a little visit, and we will go together — and the good people of Bernay-sur-Mer will not think it strange at all then, for I will tell them that you have been with me here in Paris, and that it is I who have persuaded you that it is best for you to go back and live in Bernay-sur-Mer. *Tiens*, could anything be better? And I will speak to Monsieur Bliss at once.”

She knew quite well what was in Father Anton's mind. If she were in Bernay-sur-Mer he would feel that she was quite safe, that no harm could come to her; and he had mentioned, so innocently as he believed, Amidé Dubois once or twice, and he was perhaps imagining that some day she would marry there.

But he did not understand! She shook her head slowly; and then, suddenly rousing herself, she walked across the room to the little bureau, and took out her things, and laid them upon the bed, and began to make them up into a little bundle — the same bundle she had carried with her from Bernay-sur-Mer. He did not understand!

It was all arranged! Father Anton had seen Monsieur Bliss then — and perhaps it would be to-morrow, or maybe even to-night that Father Anton would want her to go with him. But she could not go back to Bernay-sur-Mer! For nothing in the world would she go back there! If there were no other reasons, there was one that alone made it impossible — some day Jean might return there himself for a visit. And she

must go somewhere where there was no possibility that she and Jean should ever see each other — and she must go now while she had the chance. There was nothing to keep her any longer; she was quite well and strong again, and she knew that Jean was getting well, and — and she had seen Jean and his work, and she could picture his splendid life stretching out before him in which even his marriage with Mademoiselle Bliss, who was very rich and of the *grand monde*, would help to make him even greater, and — and so there remained nothing more to hold her there. It was very wonderful that it should be her lips that Jean had fashioned — unconsciously, as Father Anton said — into his clay. It was very wonderful! It was something that the *bon Dieu* had given her to make her glad; to make the sadness and remorse for the tragedy she had brought about less terrible; to make her know that, after all, her share in Jean's career had not just ended with that day, so long ago in Bernay-sur-Mer, when she had given him to France.

She tied the bundle neatly. She was ready to go now, and she picked it up, took a step toward the door — and, holding the bundle in her hand, paused hesitantly. She could not go like that — Father Anton would be in a state of frenzy over her. She — she could write him a little note. Yes; she would do that. She set the bundle down, and hurriedly untied it. She remembered that when she had written down Father Anton's address before leaving Bernay-sur-Mer she had put the pencil in the pocket of her apron. Yes; here it was, but — she looked around her in sudden anxiety — there was nothing, no paper to write on. Her eyes rested upon the bed. Madame Garneau's cream-puffs! She picked up the bag, tore a piece from it, and, taking it to the window sill, wrote a few hurried

sentences. It was just to say that she could never go to Bernay-sur-Mer; just to say that she was going away, very far away somewhere, and that he must not be sad about her, or try to find her for she did not know where she was going herself; just to say that she loved him, and that he had been so good, so very, very good to her, and that she would pray always to the *bon Dieu* for him.

There was a mist in her eyes as she folded the yellow, grease-spotted paper — she could buy an envelope and a stamp and mail it to Father Anton. She took up her bundle again, and went to the door; and, making sure that Madame Garneau was not in sight, hurried out of the house to the street. Here, she ran until she had turned the first corner and could no longer be seen from the house, then walked quietly along.

Blocks away, she stepped into a little store.

"Monsieur," she said to the man who served her with her envelope and stamp, "monsieur, will you be kind enough to tell me the way to the railway station?"

"To which one, mademoiselle?" he inquired politely. "The *Gare de l'Est*, the *Gare du Nord*, the *Gare St. Lazare*, the —"

She had not thought that there might be more than one, but one would take her away equally as well as another — it made no difference. Only he would think it very strange that she did not know which one she wanted.

"The *Gare St. Lazare*, if you please, monsieur," she ventured quickly — and thanked him when he had told her, and went out on the street again.

— IX —

MYRNA'S STRATEGY

“**T**WO months — three months in America! And to be married there!” ejaculated Henry Bliss, as he stared at his daughter in utter bewilderment.

Myrna, from the depths of her father's favourite lounging chair, which she had appropriated on entering the library after dinner that evening, nodded her head in a quite matter-of-fact way.

“Isn't this rather — rather sudden?” inquired Henry Bliss, mustering a facetious irony to his rescue.

“Oh, no!” said Myrna demurely. “I decided upon it almost a week ago.”

“Oh, you did!” — a wry smile flickered on her father's lips. “A week ago, eh? And what does Jean say?”

“Jean doesn't say anything,” replied Myrna complacently. “He doesn't know anything about it — it wasn't necessary until the time came. I haven't said anything to any one — until now.”

“Well, upon my soul!” exclaimed her father. “You are beginning early with your future husband, Myrna! So then, we are both to be twisted around your finger — eh? I shall have to speak to Jean — warn him. For myself, of course, it's quite hopeless, I've given it up years ago; but as for Jean, that's quite another matter — it's all in starting right, with a firm hand, you know!” His eyes twinkled. “I'll have a little confidential talk with Jean.”

"Don't be ridiculous, father!" she laughed. She rose from her chair. "Well, that's settled; and now I —"

"Eh — what? Settled! Nothing is settled! "What's settled?" he spluttered anxiously.

"That we are going to America, of course," said Myrna sweetly. "You, and Jean, and I."

"Now, see here, Myrna," protested her father, with what he meant for severity, "a trip to America is all very well, but it isn't the sort of thing one decides on the spur of the moment."

"Of course it isn't!" — Myrna's eyebrows went up archly. "Didn't I tell you that I have been arranging it for a whole week? I was only waiting for cable replies to some of my letters before speaking to you, and —"

"And of course as you have not overlooked minor details, I suppose we sail sometime next week!" her father interrupted with mild sarcasm.

"No," said Myrna placidly. "From Havre, the day after to-morrow, by the *Lorraine*."

Henry Bliss sat down weakly in a chair. He removed his cigar from his lips, and made one or two helpless passes with it in the air.

"Impossible!" he finally exploded. "Absolutely impossible! Utterly out of the question!"

"I don't see why," observed Myrna, quite undisturbed.

"You don't see why? No, of course, you don't see why" — Henry Bliss was still waving his cigar. "Well, I can't run away at a moment's notice, can I? Good heavens! The day after to-morrow! There's a thousand and one affairs that would have to be attended to before I could even think of it!"

"Which, of course, isn't true at all" — Myrna's

laugh rippled merrily through the room. "There are perhaps a dozen social engagements, and two or three other affairs for which you will have to send 'regrets,' and"—she perched herself cosily on the arm of her father's chair—"and your secretary will do that for you. In fact, I told him he was to do it to-morrow morning."

"You — *what?* Well, I'll be damned!" gasped Henry Bliss.

"Father!"

"Well, it was excusable!" muttered Henry Bliss. "I — I am half inclined to repeat it."

Myrna's arm slipped around her father's neck. He was quite manageable, of course — but still he had to be managed. For, if what had come within so narrow a margin of being a tragedy with a fatal ending had forced her hand and forced the inevitable, as it were, upon her, she could at least see to it that the adjustment of the new order of things was of her own arranging. It was inevitable that she would marry Jean, she had decided that long ago; it was only the "day" itself which, until all this had introduced a new factor into her plans, had been at all vague in her mind. But with Paul Valmain eliminated, and her quarrel with Jean made up as he had lain there dangerously hurt that night of the duel, everything had taken on a totally different aspect. Perhaps she had yielded a little weakly under sick-bed influences, but however that might be, she was now Jean's fiancée, though it was not publicly announced; as, coming upon the heels of Jean's mysterious accident and Paul Valmain's sudden departure from Paris, it would to a certainty have caused talk and gossip, which for very good reasons she was most anxious to avoid; for, a wheel within a wheel, if talk went too far the truth might come out, and the

truth at all hazards was the one thing that Jean must not know. This was one reason why, almost from the moment that she had grasped the situation that night in Jean's studio, she had determined to get Jean away from Paris the instant he was able to go. But there was a still stronger and more potent reason. The marriage of Jean Laparde, the world-famous sculptor, and Myrna Bliss, heiress to millions, a society leader in both Paris and New York, was not an affair to be consummated in a moment, nor to have its preparations go unmarked. It would be the most brilliant function that society had ever known on either side of the water — to that she had quite definitely made up her mind! But all that would take time; and meanwhile, more to be feared than any talk, was the possibility of Jean seeing Marie-Louise — and the possibility, or rather, perhaps, the opportunity that would be afforded to Marie-Louise herself, whom she, Myrna, was by no means inclined to trust! She was quite convinced that Jean had not seen the girl since he had left Bernay-sur-Mer, that to a certain extent the girl had told the truth, but that made it all the more imperative that he should not see her now; for if, though unconsciously so, Marie-Louise was so intimate a part of his life that the girl took form constantly in his work, it would be, to put it mildly, just as well if they did not meet — until after Jean was married. After that — well, after that, she was quite capable of looking after a *husband*! In the meantime she would take good care that the possibility of such a contretemps was entirely obviated by going to America, spending the few months necessary for the marriage preparations there, months in which Jean would be the recipient of even greater honours than Paris had accorded him, be married, and — well, that was all! It was very simple!

What this impertinent little peasant girl had attempted once, even if Father Anton did intend to take her back to Bernay-sur-Mer, she was quite capable of attempting again — if she had the chance!

Myrna nestled her arm snugly around her father's neck, and held up two daintily extended fingers before his eyes.

"Now, listen, father," she said, puckering up her forehead prettily. "Now I am going to be very serious. There are two very good reasons why we will go. First, now that Jean is able to be up again, a sea trip is the one thing above all others that he needs. Doctor Maurier prescribes it."

"Insists on it, I suppose!" observed Henry Bliss dryly.

"He will," said Myrna, laughing, "if I ask him to."

"H'm!" commented Henry Bliss, the wrinkles around his eyes beginning to nest into a smile. "Well — and the other reason?"

"The other one," said Myrna, and laid her head down against her father's cheek; "the other one is — I must whisper it — now, listen — is because I've set my heart on it, and I want to go."

"Which settles it!" groaned Henry Bliss, with mock lugubriousness. "Well" — he got up from his chair, and brushed vigorously at the cigar ash which, incident to Myrna's embrace, bedecked his waistcoat — "well, I'll see what Jean says about it."

"Why, of course!" agreed Myrna innocently. "It all depends upon Jean. We'll leave it that way, father."

Henry Bliss looked at her, gasped once — and grinned in spite of himself.

"There isn't any other trifling matter you'd like to call my attention to this evening, is there?" he haz-

arded, pinching his daughter's cheek playfully. "Because, if there is, I'm —" He paused, as a footman coughed discreetly from the doorway. "Well?" he demanded.

"It is Monsieur le Curé, Monsieur Bliss," said the man.

"Show him in," instructed Henry Bliss — and; as the man retired, glanced quickly at his daughter. "I hope, Myrna, that —"

"That we've made up our differences!" she supplied, with sudden impatience. "That I quite understand that the gentle old soul in an endeavour to set the world right meant well, and was actuated by the loftiest of motives! Oh, yes, I think Father Anton and I understand each other perfectly, and —"

"Monsieur le Curé!" announced the footman.

Myrna calmly turned her back — but only to whirl suddenly around again, as, with a sharp exclamation, her father stepped quickly toward the door.

"Good heavens, my dear man, what is the matter with you?" Henry Bliss cried out in consternation.

Father Anton's white hair was unbrushed; he was unshaved; and his face already haggard, his eyes already deep-set and blue-circled from his twenty-four hours of bedside vigil, now bore added and unmistakable signs of violent mental agitation and distraction. His hand, that held a piece of torn yellow paper, trembled as though with the ague.

"Ah, Monsieur Bliss — ah, *pardon*, mademoiselle!" he stammered, and attempted a bow. "I — I have run very fast — and — I — I —"

"Is anything the matter?" inquired Myrna coolly, joining the two at the door.

Father Anton looked at her piteously.

"She is gone!" he said, his lips quivering.

"Gone!" repeated Henry Bliss bewilderedly. "Who is gone?"

"Our charming little Marie-Louise of Bernay-sur-Mer, of course! Who else?"—Myrna laughed sharply. "Well, *mon cher* Monsieur le Curé, will you tell us how it happened? I had an idea you were very shortly to return with her to Bernay-sur-Mer. It seems I was mistaken!"

"But I do not know how it happened!"—Father Anton shook his head distractedly. "I was away last night and to-day. This evening when I returned to my rooms I found this letter from her"—he stared at the torn yellow paper in his hand, and the tears began to well into his eyes. "She said that she was going away—that she could not go back to Bernay-sur-Mer—that I was not to look for her—that she did not know where she was going herself. I waited for nothing. I ran at once to Madame Garneau's. Madame Garneau had seen nothing of Marie-Louise since this morning. We looked in Marie-Louise's room. Her clothes were gone. And then—and then I ran here to get help to find her."

"And so," said Myrna icily, "are we never to hear the last of her? The trouble in the first place is of your own making, Father Anton—it is unfortunate that others have to suffer for it! Well, what does it mean? She did not want to go back to Bernay-sur-Mer—she has run away from you—from everybody that could keep track of her. Why? That she can go to Jean again without being found out?" She shrugged her shoulders. "However, under the circumstances, if that is so, it will do her little good, since Jean himself is going away to—"

"No, no!" Father Anton cried out brokenly. "You do not know Marie-Louise! You do not know

Marie-Louise to say that! She, more than any one else, would not let Jean know. It is because her heart is broken that she has gone. And it is true, I am to blame." The tears were running down his cheeks; he held out his hands to them imploringly. "She is not well — she is only just recovered from her illness, my little Marie-Louise, and — and —" the words died away in a sort of frightened sob, at a quick, warning touch upon his arm from Myrna.

Steps came running across the hall — and the next moment Jean himself was standing in the doorway.

"*Tiens!*" he cried out gaily. "It is the first time I have left the studio. I would not let the man announce me. *Me voici!* Here I am! It is a surprise — eh? But — eh! — what is the matter?" He stared at the three — at Henry Bliss, who was evidencing palpable confusion; at Myrna, who seemed suddenly to have lost her colour; at Father Anton, who had tears trickling down his face, and acted as though he were gazing at a ghost.

"It — it is Jean!" faltered Father Anton nervously, the letter fluttering from his hand to the floor.

"But, yes, of course, it is Jean! Who else?" Jean laughed — and stepped forward mechanically to pick up the paper. "Permit me. I —"

A dainty satin-slippered toe was covering the letter. Myrna was smiling reprovingly.

"It is quite time enough for you to be gallant, Jean, when you can do so without the danger of reopening your wound!" she said sweetly. "Have you not been told often enough that you are not to stoop down like that? Father Anton is much better able than you to pick it up!"

"Yes, yes," said Father Anton hurriedly, reaching for the paper and tucking it into the breast of his *sou-*

tane. "Yes, you — you must be careful of yourself, Jean."

"Nonsense!" declared Jean. "I am perfectly recovered!" He stared at the three in turn again for a moment. "But — but perhaps I am intruding — *de trop?*"

"Not at all!" Myrna answered composedly. "It is a matter that concerns only father and Monsieur le Curé; and they" — she glanced brightly at her father — "I am sure, will be only too glad to get away to father's den where they can discuss it by themselves."

"Yes — er — yes, of course," coughed Henry Bliss. "It's — er — good to see you out again, Jean, my boy." Then jocularly, in an attempt to disguise his self-consciousness: "Come along, Father Anton" — he caught the other's arm, and led the curé out of the room — "there are perhaps others who prefer to be by themselves."

A slightly puzzled expression on his face, Jean watched them out of sight across the hall; then turned inquiringly to Myrna.

Myrna's shoulders lifted daintily.

"If it isn't one thing, it's another," she said, as though the subject bored her. "There has always been something or other ever since father started that fund of his; and the curé trots to father with everything. This time, it seems that one of Father Anton's protégées has run away from him; and, as you saw, the curé is beside himself." Again the shoulders lifted. "But you, Jean" — infusing a sudden note of perturbed anxiety into her voice — "are you sure you were wise in coming out to-night? What brought you?"

And then Jean threw back his head, and laughed, and closed the door — and caught her in his arms.

"*Mon Dieu!*" he cried, holding her close to him, and trying to kiss the suddenly averted face. "Do you ask what brought me? Well, then, I will tell you! Did you not say that you would come this afternoon, and did you not promise that we would settle about our marriage? And you did not come, and all the afternoon I was waiting, and now"—his face fell a little, as she slipped away from him—"and now that I am here you run away from me."

"You are too impulsive, Jean! You are destruction on gowns!" she laughed, and backed merrily away from him to sink down gracefully in a chair.

"Gowns!" he echoed, a sudden flush of anger coming to his cheeks, as he followed her. "What does it matter, a gown, when—"

"Now, don't be cross!" she commanded teasingly; and, gaily regal, extended her hand. "See, here is my hand to kiss."

He hesitated; and then, as, a little sullenly, he bent and touched her fingers with his lips, she laughed again. She loved to excite and watch moods in Jean—as now for instance, when the tall, strong figure was drawn up haughtily, and the emotions, that he would never learn to hide, were so apparent in his face, as he bit his lips and pulled at his short, pointed beard. Jean was as readable as a book at all times, and always would be—which was not a bad trait for a husband to possess! And this was Jean Laparde, the man of genius, unquestionably at that moment the most famous man in France! She smiled at him through half veiled eyes. To be Madame Laparde! Socially, it meant an incomparable triumph; intimately, it meant—well, at least, it was obvious enough that the marriage need hold no terror of tyranny in store for her! Jean, for all his greatness, and save for his occasional

passionate outbursts, was as plastic as his own clay. Her eyelids lifted, and in the grey eyes was laughter.

"Well, and why the brown study? What are you thinking about?" she demanded pertly.

"I was thinking of Paul Valmain," he answered abruptly.

"Paul Valmain!" she repeated — and sat suddenly upright in her chair.

"Yes," said Jean, a little bitterly. "That he would have small reason to be jealous, even now that we are engaged."

"Don't be absurd!" she retorted sharply.

Jean shrugged his shoulders.

"And speaking of Paul Valmain," he went on, a menacing note creeping into his tones, "I have been talking to Hector again this afternoon about that night — the night that Valmain said he saw you enter the house."

She looked at him quickly. Surely, after what she had said to Hector, Hector had not dared to speak of the girl to whom he had given — reprehensibly, she had taken pains to make Hector understand — a key to Jean's studio. She believed she had frightened Hector and Madame Mi-mi too thoroughly for that, and yet — if he had!

"Well?" — serenely, as her eyebrows went up.

"Nothing! He knows nothing! He heard nothing!" Jean flung out impatiently. "But Hector is a fool, and Valmain said he saw you go in."

"Well, was I there?" she inquired frigidly.

"No, you were not there — naturally!" he asserted with wrathful finality. "But — I have been thinking — if it were some one else!"

"Ah!" Myrna's smile was cold, as she rose with a curiously ominous air from her chair. "Ah! Some

one else! Well, since you bring up the subject again, do you imagine I am so stupid that such a possibility has not also occurred to *me*? Your conscience seems to trouble you, Monsieur Jean! If there was some one else — a woman in your rooms from two o'clock at night until daylight — you should know better who it was, I imagine, than either Hector or Madame Mi-mi! And since I am your fiancée, Monsieur Jean — perhaps you will explain!"

"But, *sacré nom d'un diable!*" Jean shouted in angry amazement. "I know of no woman!"

"If there was a woman there it is inconceivable that you should not know it" — Myrna's voice was monotonous, relentless.

"But, I tell you — *no!*" — Jean's hands went up in the air, as he raged in exasperation. "Do you understand, that I tell you — no? It is not so! There was no woman there!"

"Well, then?" — still monotonously.

"Well, then?" Jean stormed furiously, clenching his fists, "it can be nothing but that cursed Valmain and his damned jealousy! It can be nothing but a lie, all of it, that he has made up! It is all a lie then — nothing but a lie! And so I am not through with him! He will answer for it! I am not through with him! It will not be with swords this time — we will fight with pistols, and I will kill him! He thinks he has no longer any reason to hide and stay away — but, *nom de Dieu*, he will see! I promise you that! Vinailles told me that Valmain would be back the day after to-morrow, and" — he laughed out harshly — "the day after to-morrow —"

"You are going to America," said Myrna calmly.

Jean's clenched fist, raised, remained motionless in mid-air. He stared at her open-mouthed.

"To — to America!" he gasped.

"To be married there," supplemented Myrna composedly.

"To be married there!" — he repeated the words in his bewilderment like a parrot.

"And to receive an ovation, to be accorded a triumph such as you have never dreamed of." Her laugh trilled out deliciously. "You will see how they do things in America!"

He was still staring at her in dumfounded amazement.

"To America — to be married — a triumph!" he mumbled dazedly. "But — but who —"

"I did," said Myrna, laughing at him again. "Did you not remind me that I had promised to tell you about our marriage to-day? Well, we are to be married in America. Are you not delighted?"

"But — but, yes! *Mon Dieu!* But — but, yes!" stammered Jean helplessly.

"Well, then," said Myrna, puckering up her brows in prettily affected deliberation, "I think, Monsieur Jean, you may kiss me — once."

THROUGH THE FOG

WITH an angry tightening of his lips, as he caught sight of Myrna still the centre of the same masculine *entourage*, Jean turned from the window where he had paused for an instant to glance into the ship's main saloon, transformed for the moment into a ballroom, and resumed his moody pacing up and down the deck. He pulled his ulster more closely about him, for the night was cold, lighted a cigarette and puffed at it irritably, as he was forced to acknowledge the, for the most part effusive, salutes that his fellow passengers went out of their way to accord him, as in couples and groups they constantly came and went between the saloon and the deck. Then, after another turn or two, he tossed away his cigarette with a vicious jerk, sought out the most secluded portion of the deck — a recess near the ship's funnels — and, appropriating a steamer chair, flung himself into it.

He had barely ensconced himself there, however, when, with a muttered oath, he sat angrily upright in the chair again. Was there no place on the cursed ship where he could be alone for five minutes with his own thoughts? He had left the dance after a heated, if short, altercation with Myrna, been annoyed by the advances of those on deck, and now two women had elected to halt within earshot of him around the corner to *discuss* him!

"Well," murmured a voice sweetly, "have you met the famous Monsieur Laparde yet?"

"No" — eagerly. "Have you?"

"No — not exactly, my dear" — patronisingly. "But I'll promise to introduce you in the morning."

"Oh, *will* you? How perfectly gorgeous! You *are* a dear! But how have you managed it? Tell me all about it! I'm simply dying to know how you succeeded!"

"It wasn't at all difficult" — in naïve self-disparagement. "I met Mr. Bliss. He's simply charming, and so unaffected! He is going to tell me all about the art schools in Paris — of course, I'm terribly interested! There are three in their party, you know — Mr. Bliss and his daughter, and Monsieur Laparde."

"Do you think she's pretty? I don't see what all the men are raving about! And did you notice her dress to-night — those black velvet shoulder straps are actually startling!"

"Yes — *aren't* they? I've heard so many remarks about them! But I suppose she *is* pretty — in a way. It's being whispered around that she is going to marry Monsieur Laparde. I wonder if it's true?"

"Huh!" — with a sniff. "Well, if it is true, Monsieur Laparde does not do what I would do if I were a man in his place. It's simply outrageous the way she carries on, if she's engaged. I wouldn't stand it for a moment! She must have the wool pretty thoroughly pulled over his eyes, if he imagines she is in love with him!"

"In love with his name, my dear" — in cooing amendment. "I don't suppose she *does* care for anything else. She doesn't appeal to me as that kind of a woman. I'm sure I think just as you do about her."

I wouldn't care to trust her very far from what I've seen of her — she's the sort that always strikes me as being capable of saying *anything* behind one's back! She flirts mercilessly!"

"Yes; and fancy a man like Monsieur Laparde permitting himself to be made ridiculous! Did you notice this morning, when everybody wanted to walk, that the deck was utterly impassable with her court spreading their chairs two or three deep all around her? Of course, one can't *say* anything! And all the time she had Monsieur Laparde trotting back and forth like an overgrown errand boy, carrying books and wraps and —"

"No, my dear, you are quite wrong there. She couldn't make a man like Monsieur Laparde ridiculous — she could only make one feel sorry for him."

"Well, anyway, it's quite evident that she — oh, isn't that Lord Mornely just going inside? Gracious, I had no idea I was getting so cold! Do come! I'm nearly perished! We'll catch our deaths out here!"

The arms of the steamer chair creaked as Jean's hands clenched upon them. His face was crimson with passion. What right had these cursed and *banale* women to meddle in his affairs, and to discuss him? His hands gripped harder on the chair and it creaked again. So, then, this was the talk and gossip of the ship — and everybody knew it! If it were idle talk he could have laughed at it, and gone and bowed before them sardonically, and taken his revenge in their confusion; but it was true, and it only made his fury the greater. They had but voiced his own thoughts of five minutes ago, and his thoughts of yesterday, and of the day before, and of the days before that, since almost from the moment indeed that Myrna had promised to be his wife — the moment that once,

like a poor, deluded fool, he had thought would be counted the greatest in his life! A hundred little things during his convalescence had been like signposts of bitter disappointment. She cared nothing for Jean Laparde the man; she was marrying Jean Laparde the sculptor-genius, whose name was on every tongue! She did not know the meaning of love! She loved only what his name might bring her. There was no tenderness, no intimacy. She *put up* with him — *sacré nom!* — that was all! He had refused to believe it in those few days in Paris. He had shut his eyes to it then. He could not shut his eyes to it here on board ship — where everybody's eyes, even those damned cats'! were open. And now she seemed to assume that, since he was her property, her possession, and that the whole matter, as far as it concerned her, was quite and entirely settled to her satisfaction, she could devote herself to a new affair every half-hour, while he, he, Jean Laparde, the great Laparde, looked on — and grinned!

He rose savagely from his chair, and, turning up the collar of his ulster and pulling his cap far down over his eyes, went along to the extreme end of the deck. Here, unprotected by the canvas weather-cloths such as those along the ship's side that closed in the promenade, sheltering the passengers from the damp, driving mist of a North Atlantic fog, it was wet and uninviting enough to guarantee him immunity from any intrusion. Below him, as he looked over the rail, the steerage deck, dim, dismal, forbidding, was deserted save for a few people, who, probably choosing the lesser of two evils, braving the night in preference to sharing the fetid atmosphere below with many hundred others, were huddled about in miserable discomfort. He stared at this sight for a moment; then turned around,

and leaned with his back against the rail to face the gay, brilliantly-lighted scene far down at the other end of the promenade deck. He watched this sullenly — the extravagantly gowned women and their escorts coming and going like hiving bees from the deck to the saloon . . . clustering around the entrance . . . retailing the ship's gossip . . . a breath of air . . . a cigarette . . . and back to the dance again. Who cared what the night was like? Who cared if, far up above on the mighty liner's bridge, oil-skinned figures peered out anxiously into the night? Who cared or thought of those huddled forms on the steerage deck? Who cared — the sea was smooth, and one could dance?

Jean dug his hands deep down into his pockets and closed them fiercely. The long, hoarse-throated cry of the fog siren boomed out and vibrated through the ship — and died away; and, sharp in contrast, came again the calm, steady pulse and throb of the engines, and laughter, and the dreamy, sobbing notes of a waltz.

And now a depression, utter and profound, a more grievous thing than the fury that had preceded it, was settling upon him. It was not only Myrna, the knowledge forced home upon him that he was but a vehicle for her ambitions, that their marriage was to be a hollow thing, a form, a husk covering the semblance of love — it was the sea! Until this trip he had not seen it since he had left Bernay-sur-Mer. It held a thousand memories. He had fought them back angrily, defiantly ever since he had come on board — but they had been present almost from the hour that the shores of the France he loved had faded from sight, and at unexpected moments this thing and that had flashed suddenly upon him, striking with quick, stabbing passes under his guard. But now, his spirits at a low ebb,

reckless of combating even poignant memories — those memories were surging overwhelmingly upon him. It seemed to mirror his life like some strange kaleidoscope, the sea that he had always known; it seemed to stir something within him that was soul-deep in his life — the smell of it in his nostrils, the feel of it upon his cheeks was flinging wide apart now the floodgates of the past.

Living, vivid before him was the sparkling, wonderful blue of that southern sea, fringed with the little white cottages of Bernay-sur-Mer that had been his home; and beneath bare feet he felt again the smooth, fine, yielding sand upon the beach where as a baby he had crawled, where still a baby he had taken his first step, where as a man he had struggled for his place among men and once had played a man's part. The cheery voices of the fishermen as they launched their boats were in his ears; they called to him; and laughed; and, because all were his friends, twitted him good-naturedly, twitted him and teased him about — about Marie-Louise. Marie-Louise! A low, sharp, involuntary cry of pain rose to his lips. With a violent effort he tried to shake himself free from his thoughts — but it was as though he were in the grip of some strange, immutable power that held him bound and shackled, while with lightning-like rapidity, whether he would or no, upon him rushed the ever-changing scenes.

The face of Madame Fregeau, his foster-mother, coarse-featured perhaps, but beautiful because it was a sweet and wholesome face, came before him; and her arms that were rough, and red, and shapeless were around his neck in an old-time embrace. She had loved him, the good Mother Fregeau! Came the faces of Pierre Lachance, of Papa Fregeau, of little Ninon, of a score of toddling mites clapping their

hands in childish ecstasy over the clay *poupées* he had made for them — and all these had been his friends. And all these were gone now, all were gone, and in their place was — what? He raised his head. Hoarse-tongued, the siren cried again. It seemed like the wail of a lost soul out-flung into the night, into the vastness, calling, calling where there was none to answer — echoing the loneliness that was filling his heart that night.

He had forgotten all these things in Paris; he had made himself forget — and besides there had been Myrna. He had fought for her, striven for her tempestuously, fiercely, as a prize that nor heaven nor hell could hold back from him — and, ghastly in its mocking irony, it was only when the prize was won that, like some wondrously beautiful, iridescent bubble, glorious in its colours as the sunlight played upon it, it burst and nothing but the dregs of it remained as he reached out and grasped it in his hands. He had looked for the love, the passion that he could give in return; he had found only a cold-blooded strategical move on the checkerboard of social aspirations. He was not blind any more — nor angry. It was only a profound and bitter loneliness that he knew. It would be a dreary thing, that marriage — and dreary years. Once, when he had no right, he had forced his kisses upon her; he had no more inclination now to force from her what should be so freely offered — and was withheld!

Who cared for Jean Laparde? Not Myrna! He had bought her as he had sworn he would buy her, and his own words had come true — with fame. He was the great Laparde! But who cared for *Jean* Laparde? None that he knew now! All that was in the past; all that was in the little village on the Mediterranean shore in the days when he had made the clay *poupées* on the

banks of the creek, and dreamed of that wondrous dream statue that had been so real a thing to him — and now even that was gone — and he was alone.

Ah, they were back again, those scenes of Bernay-sur-Mer! Whose face was that? Gaston Bernier! Old Gaston! And what was this that he was living again, that was so cruel in its realism? That night on the Perigeau . . . that night when old Gaston died . . . that day when he had made the beacon for Marie-Louise, the beacon with its arms outstretched that — he covered his face suddenly with his hands. If he could only strangle these thoughts — God, the loneliness and the pain they brought!

How the strains of that waltz seemed to sob out like some broken-hearted, lost and wandering thing! He shivered a little. How cold the night was, how wet and damp! How the engines throbbed, throbbed, throbbed, and seemed to catch the tempo of the distant music, and like muffled drums beat time to it as to a dirge!

His hands dropped to his sides. From far down the deck came Myrna's rippling, silvery peal of laughter; and, through the group around her, he caught the sparkle of the magnificent diamond necklace at her throat, the white, fluffy wrap of fur thrown across her shoulders — and heard her laugh again. And at her laugh, he turned bitterly around to the rail to face the night as the ship drove into it, to let the wind and the wet mist blow into his face, to look down on the steerage deck below him. What a contrast! There, just beneath where he stood, in the filmy light that shone out from an open alleyway, alone, unsheltered, a pathetic figure in the drifting mist, her clothes damp around her, a woman leaned with bowed head against the ship's side. A wave of pity, but a pity that knew

bitterness and irony, came upon him. What would he read in the face of this poor immigrant if he could but see it? Misery? She looked miserable enough! Loneliness? Was she lonely, too? Was she as lonely as he? And then, as though in answer to his thoughts, she turned suddenly, lifting her face, and with a gesture of infinite yearning, of infinite longing, stretched out her arms toward the land, toward France, so far behind.

He did not move. He uttered no sound. In that moment, as she made that gesture, he was living only subconsciously. It was his beacon with outstretched arms, with those pure, perfect lips, with that sweet, gentle face, beautiful even with the pallor that was upon it. *It was Marie-Louise!*

The voices, the waltz strains, the throb of the engine, the sounds about him, the lift and fall of the liner's deck, the blackness of the night, all were blotted from him. He was conscious only of that figure on the deck below. There she stood, her arms outstretched — outstretched as he had modelled her in that figure that first had brought him fame, and his own words of the days gone by were ringing in his ears again. "See, it is a beacon — the welcome of the fisherman home from the sea. And are you not that, Marie-Louise, and will you not stand on the shore at evening and hold out your arms for me as I pull home in the boat? Are you not the beacon, Marie-Louise — for me?" A welcome he had called it then, that posture of outstretched arms, that now symbolised, mute in its anguish, the tearing away from her of all that life had ever held to make it glad and joyous, the love of cherished France, her native country, her home, the friends that made home dear, those that loved her, those she

loved. Those she loved! And of them all, she had loved him, Jean Laparde — the most! It seemed to sound the depths of some abysmal treason in his soul. Whom or what had she to welcome now? It seemed to sum up all the tragedy that life could hold, and sweep upon him and engulf him. It was Marie-Louise standing there on the steerage deck! It was Marie-Louise! He did not need to ask why — the answer was in his own soul.

And now a moan broke from his lips; and condemnation, stripped of mercy, naked, bare in its remorseless arraignment, surged upon him. Honour, and glory, and wealth, and power, and fame, and luxury were his — and what had she, alone here in the cold, wet misery of the steerage, driven to the deck perhaps for a breath of pure air from where below a thousand, babel-tongued, were cattle-herded? What had she — where he had all? If the memories of that little white-cottaged haven on the sun-kissed shores of the Mediterranean had brought him a bitter loneliness — what must those memories be bringing to her? There, in Bernay-sur-Mer, was the only life that she had ever known; there were the simple folk who loved her; there were her friends, her associations; there was her little world; there was her all — and he had driven her from it! As surely as though by brutal physical force, he had driven her from it! Yes; he had done that! That was why she was here!

His face, grey as the mist around him, went down on his arms upon the rail, and a sob shook the great shoulders. Where were the dreams that she and he had dreamed of life there together in the love that had known its birth in childhood? Where were they? Who had shattered them, that she was no longer there, but stood an outcast, friendless and alone, here in the

steerage of the ship that was taking her from France? Where was the oath that he had sworn to Gaston as the brave old fisherman had died? "There is a crucifix there; swear that you will guard her and that you will let no harm come to her." Forsworn! A traitor! He had chosen fame, and power, and position — and she, in her pure, unselfish love, had stood aside for him!

Again the sullen boom of the siren mourned out into the night, held, quavered, died away. Silence, intense, absolute! Then, stealing again upon the senses, the slap and wash of water against the liner's hull, the medley of a thousand ship sounds.

"*God!*" — the soul-torn cry fluttered from Jean's lips.

He had chosen wealth, and power, and fame, and position, and they had been Marie-Louise's gift to him — and his gift to her in return had been the bitterest dregs of life! And now wealth, and power, and fame, and position were his to-day, his beyond that of any other man's, he knew them all; they were his; he knew the adulation and the fawning of the great; but out of it all, out of the pomp and pageantry and the glitter, the tinsel and the gleam of gold, where was the one supreme, undying, immortal truth of life — who cared for Jean Laparde?

And then, as he raised his head and looked at her again, a strange, glad wonder crept upon him. Who cared for Jean Laparde? Out of all the world, who cared for Jean Laparde? In the figure there, wind-swept, the damp, thin clothing clinging closely about her form, in the face, half-veiled by the night and mist, he saw again that figure on the Perigeau Reef that once he had been man enough to risk his all, his life to save; and the kiss that had been his, the kiss that pledged

them to each other in the fury of that storm, seemed warm again upon his lips — a pledge again — his answer! Who cared for Jean Laparde?

He strained toward her over the rail. It seemed as though some flame of glory were lighting up her face, and, reflected back, was lighting up his own soul with understanding. Those lips, the face, the throat, everything, all — he knew it now! — it was *she* that he had been modelling there in Paris! It was she who was the womanhood of France to him because her soul and his were one, she who had been living in his heart, she that he loved — she who cared for Jean Laparde!

He lifted his head, bared now, far back on the massive shoulders. There was one way, and one way only, that he could claim her now. To be the Jean Laparde of old again! To slough from him the trappings that had stood a barrier between them! To be the Jean Laparde again of the world she knew!

He leaned further over the rail. She was moving away. He watched her, his face aglow — watched her until she was lost in the darkness along the deck.

“Marie-Louise! Marie-Louise!” he whispered, and reached out his arms. “I am coming to you, Marie-Louise — my beacon — to you, Marie-Louise.”

— XI —

THE "DEATH" OF JEAN LAPARDE

HOW wonderful the metamorphosis in all around him! How glad and gay and happy were the waltz strains floating merrily upon the air from far down the deck, how exquisite the melody and harmony rippling through the chords! And the chill and ugliness of the night were gone; and the loneliness was gone; and it was as though a glorious moonlit, star-decked sky were overhead; and the wet mist that drove upon him was as some magical, refreshing balm that laved his face! And in his heart was song.

"Marie-Louise! Marie-Louise! I am coming to you, Marie-Louise — my beacon — to you, Marie-Louise." He stretched out his arms again across the rail; and then turning, and hurrying because there was a lightness in his steps that would not let them lag, he sought the deck companionway close at hand, and ran up to the deck above.

Not concrete yet, only dim and misty in his mind a plan took form. Only one thing stood out, sharp-lined, clear, absolute, irrevocable in itself — he must go to Marie-Louise paying the price. For, apart from all else, apart from the certainty that if he went to her as the great Laparde she would only bid him return again, not in bitterness but in her splendid self-abnegation, apart from this — how else could he make her believe him? He, a man who once had forsworn his

oath; he, who once, in her stead, had chosen in ghastly selfishness the fame, the position, the place that were now his — how else could he make her believe him? How else, unless he flung them from him, when once for these very things, a traitor to his manhood and to her, he had turned his back upon her, could she believe that now he held them as naught compared to her; how else could she believe that in his soul and heart, dominant, supreme, lived now only a love for her, greater than it had ever been because it was chastened now, a love near like to her own great wondrous love that she had offered him — and he had spurned? How else — unless to-night the great Laparde should die, and in his place should live again the Jean Laparde she once had known, the humble fisherman of Bernay-sur-Mer?

The fisherman of Bernay-sur-Mer! Yes, that was it! It seemed to crystallise suddenly, sharply, into definite, tangible form, the shadowy, nebulous plan that, from the moment his decision had been made as he had stood and watched her there below him on the steerage deck, had been seeking for expression in his mind. The fisherman of Bernay-sur-Mer! None would recognise in the fisherman of Bernay-sur-Mer the Jean Laparde that the world knew — none save her!

He was before the door of his luxurious deck-suite, and in feverish excitement now he flung it open, closed and locked it behind him, switched on the lights, and ran through the sitting-room into the bedroom beyond.

Here, where there had been confusion, his things thrown everywhere when he had dressed for dinner and the dance, all was now in order, and his two steamer trunks were neatly stowed away — the steward's work — beneath the brass bed. He dropped on his knees, and hurriedly dragged one out — the one that Myrna Bliss had chosen for him that day when they had gone

to Marseilles from Bernay-sur-Mer. If only Hector had not disturbed it! *Bon Dieu*, if Hector had not meddled with it! He wrenched up the lid. It was Marie-Louise who had thrust that fisherman's suit into his arms that day when she had told him he was free! What was it she had said? Yes, yes! "Promise me, Jean, that you will keep these with you always, and that sometimes in your great world you will look at them and remember — that they too belong to France." And he had laid them in the bottom of the trunk; and, because he had not forgotten so soon, when Hector, whom he had found already installed at the studio, had unpacked for him on his first arrival in Paris, he had told Hector always to leave them there, never to take them out — but after that he had forgotten. He lifted out the tray, and began to remove the clothing that lay beneath it. It was Hector who had packed the trunk for the journey, and — with an exultant cry, he straightened up, the old, worn, heavy boots, the coarse socks still tucked into their tops, in his hands.

He put these down, and reached into the trunk again. Yes, they were all here — the cap; the woollen shirt; the rough suit, crumpled, white-spotted with the old salt stains of the sea.

And then for a moment he stood and looked at them — and looked about the cabin — and for a moment fear came. As a blow that staggered him there fell upon him the full significance of their glaring contrast with the rich fittings of the stateroom-de-luxe about him. They seemed to mock at him, these garments, and jeeringly bid him put them back again into the trunk — as he *had* done once before. What hideously insincere jest did he imagine he was playing with himself, they sneered at him! What had he to do with toil, and poverty, and hardship, with the life these

things stood for — he who knew the palaces of kings, he who had luxury, he who had fame, he who had all that he had ever longed for, he who had everything that money, that position, that authority could procure, he who had but to rub the lamp and demand of the world his will?

"No, no!" he cried out suddenly aloud — and, with a quick, impulsive movement, tore off his ulster and threw it on the bed. It was Marie-Louise now — Marie-Louise! Once she had given her all for him. It was Marie-Louise, wonderful, beautiful, pitiful, the saddest soul in all the world, out there alone on the steerage deck!

And then he stood still again, hesitant, listening. Some one was knocking on the cabin door. And now the door was tried — the knock repeated. Disturbed, uncertain, he still hesitated — then, stepping into the sitting-room, he closed the connecting door between it and the bedroom, and unlocked and opened the door to the deck.

It was Henry Bliss.

"Ah, you're here, Jean!" the other exclaimed, with what was obviously an attempt at unconcern, as he stepped into the cabin. "I've been looking for you all over the ship. What are you doing up here in your room alone, with all this gaiety going on below? Eh — what's the matter?"

Jean stared at Henry Bliss a little sullenly. Since the other had come, was there — it remained only to get rid of him as soon as possible.

"There is nothing the matter," he said shortly — and shrugged his shoulders.

Henry Bliss frowned, and rubbed his hand over his chin nervously.

"Confound it, Jean!" he burst out abruptly. "I

know better! You and Myrna have been having another — er — another misunderstanding. In fact, she — that is, I discovered it a few moments ago. I” — he glanced about him as though to make sure they were alone, and caught Jean’s arm confidentially — “I spoke to her very seriously, *very* seriously about it. I — I am sure it is nothing. It is only that you take these things very much to heart, Jean, while she laughs at them.”

“*Pardieu!*” ejaculated Jean ironically. “That is so!”

“No, no!” said Henry Bliss, hurriedly and in confusion. “No — I — that is not what I meant, Jean. Not at all what I meant! I mean that if she takes it lightly, it cannot — er — be so — er —”

“I know what you mean,” said Jean moodily. “I have discovered it for myself.”

“Tut, tut!” protested Henry Bliss anxiously. “This will never do at all, Jean! You must both make an effort to understand each other better. Myrna is very — er — high-spirited — very! You see that, of course, Jean — eh? Well? Tut, tut! That is all! You must not be too firm or — er — exacting with her at first. I have found — that is, I have not found that to be the most tactful way of handling her. Now slip on your overcoat, my boy, and we’ll go down together.”

Again Jean shrugged his shoulders. Would it be necessary to open the door and bow even Henry Bliss out?

“No,” he said, with pointed finality; “not now. I prefer to remain here for a little while — alone.”

Henry Bliss, perturbed and upset, coughed uneasily — and suddenly began to fumble through his pockets. His fingers encountering first a cigar, he took it out

mechanically, and, as evidence of the composure he did not possess, bit off the end with deliberate care. Then he fumbled through his pockets again, and this time produced a marconigram. He tapped it playfully with one finger, and smiled engagingly at Jean.

"Well, well, I knew I had a panacea with me," he said cheerily. "This came by wireless half an hour ago; it's what sent me out on the hunt for you, and ran me into Myrna, and made me stumble on the lovers' quarrel that I am sure will end just like all the rest of them — eh — my boy? Listen!" — unfolding the message. "It is from a gentleman with whom I am well acquainted, who is very prominent in art circles in New York, stating that he has just learned that you are en route for America, and asking, on behalf of the leading New York societies, if you will accept a public reception on the steamer's arrival in New York. There you are, my boy! Think of that! I promise you that it will be something to eclipse anything you could imagine. We *do* things in America — if I say it myself! It will be the triumph of your career. Bands, flags, bunting, cheers, the dock *en fête* — to say nothing of reporters" — he was laughing now, and patting Jean's arm excitedly. "They'll show you, my boy, what they think of Jean Laparde in America! That's the kind of a welcome they're getting ready for you — it will be the greatest moment of your life! But here" — he stole an almost wistful glance at Jean, and stepping over to the writing desk at the side of the cabin, laid the marconigram down — "I'll just leave this here, and" — he coughed again, and moved tactfully to the door — "and you just kind of think about that instead of anything else, and — er — in about half an hour or so, I'll bring Myrna along up, and we'll talk it all over together — eh — my boy?"

He waved his hand genially, and, without waiting for a reply, went out.

For a moment Jean did not move; then his eyes, as though drawn irresistibly in that direction, shifted from the door that had closed on Henry Bliss to the marconigram lying on the desk — and abruptly he walked over and picked up the wireless message. He read it through laboriously, for his English still came hard to him — and read it again, more slowly, lingering over the words, muttering snatches of the sentences aloud. “. . . Shall spare no effort . . . endeavour worthily to express our sentiments . . . splendid genius of which France is so justly proud . . .”

And, holding it there in his hands, a dull flush came and spread itself over Jean's face. The triumph of his career, Henry Bliss had said — the greatest moment of his life! This great and wonderful America, of which he had heard so much, was waiting for him eagerly — waiting for him — Jean Laparde — Jean Laparde! This was to be his welcome to that New Land where all was on a scale so tremendous and magnificent. To his ears there came the mighty roar of thousands shouting again and again the name of Jean Laparde; before his eyes a sea of faces looked up into his from dense-lined streets as he drove along — and all, all in that vast multitude were cheering, waving, acclaiming Jean Laparde. They were waiting for him there at the gateway to America, open-handed, royal in their hospitality, to pay him honour such as he had never known before. They were waiting for him there — for him — for Jean Laparde! They were waiting —

The flush faded from his face, and a whiteness came, and upon his forehead oozed out a bead of moisture — and, as the seconds passed, he hung there almost limply,

swaying a little in the agony that was upon him. And then slowly the paper that was in his hands was torn across, and the pieces fluttered to the floor, and the great head rose proud in kingship on the broad shoulders — the kingship of himself, the kingship of Jean Laparde.

Ay, they were waiting for him — but there was another beside who was waiting too! He looked at the torn pieces of paper on the floor — and his laugh rang suddenly clear and buoyant through the cabin. Once he had sold his soul for such as that; but to-night, in spite of these devil's tempters that sought to shake his resolution — there was his answer! There was his answer — the answer that had come to him through the fog and mist as through a veil rent suddenly asunder, the answer that was in Marie-Louise's outstretched arms, the answer that was in her banishment from the friends and the France she loved, in the bitter wrong that he had done, in her love that now he knew for its priceless worth! There in that torn paper was his answer!

And he laughed again — and as he laughed, he ran to the door and locked it for the second time. There would be no more of that, no more interruption, no more of those tempter thoughts, no more of them! And, for the moment, no more thought even of Marie-Louise. He had need to centre all his attention upon his immediate acts now, for he must be very careful what he did. And he had little time — had not Henry Bliss said that in half an hour he would return with Myrna?

He ran back into the bedroom, tore off his coat, vest and shirt; and, catching up his toilet-case, hurried into the bathroom. Here, he clipped off his beard and shaved it close — then quickly, a sort of tense, keyed-up

excitement constantly growing upon him, he returned once more to the bedroom, and, stripping off the remainder of his clothes, began to put on the fisherman's suit. How heavy and stiff the boots felt upon his feet, how rough and coarse the socks were against his skin — and yet how their familiarity thrilled him! He swung his arms, wondering and laughing at the free play of his muscles in the loose shirt, and memories and thoughts began to press upon him — but he checked them almost instantly, for there was no time now for that.

He finished dressing hastily. He must leave no clue behind him that would occasion even a suspicion that he had not carried out the purpose that the world, and essentially those on board the ship, must be made to believe was the last act of Jean Laparde. Amongst a thousand, amongst the conglomerate races that cluttered the ship's steerage, where even amongst themselves few knew each other, where difference in language precluded all but the most scattered and superficial acquaintanceship, none would recognise Jean Laparde in the rough-garbed fisherman — provided always that no search was instituted, provided always that there should be no *incentive* in the mind of any one to search, provided always that it was accepted as a fact — that Jean Laparde was dead! He could not hope perhaps, between now and the time they reached New York, or, at least, on landing, to escape the attention of the ship's officers or the shore officials; but with Jean Laparde a suicide in the mist and fog of that Atlantic night, he would be no more to them than one as rough and ignorant and poor as those others in the steerage — no more than a stowaway.

Jean dropped down on his knees again beside the trunk, and began to replace the articles he had been

obliged to remove in order to get at the fisherman's suit. Nothing — not a sign of anything approaching disorder must appear. They would look through everything — Myrna and her father! He shrugged his shoulders whimsically. The visit of Henry Bliss to the cabin, the other's knowledge of the quarrel with Myrna, the other's concern over his, Jean's, moodiness, was, after all, not to be regretted! It would have its significance for Henry Bliss!

He pushed the trunk back beside its mate under the bed. Money now! A sudden, sharp exclamation, almost of dismay, escaped him. He had little or no money — a few French notes, sufficient for his needs on board ship only. Monsieur Bliss had said more was unnecessary — that he could make drafts through the other's banking connections in New York as he needed them. He searched through the clothes he had taken off, found his pocketbook, opened it, and counted the contents — five twenty-franc notes, a ten-franc gold piece, some silver — that was all! Less than twenty-five dollars in American money! Well, if it was all — it was all! It could not be helped! He shoved the pocketbook philosophically into his pocket; and, gathering up the clothes he had worn, tied them into a bundle. There remained only the heavy ulster.

He looked slowly, critically about him; and, satisfied that he had overlooked nothing, walked swiftly into the sitting-room, seated himself at the writing desk, and, from one of its pigeon-holes, pulled out a sheet of the ship's notepaper. He hesitated a moment thoughtfully — then picked up a pen.

"*Je m'ennui de tout* — I am tired of it all," he wrote. He balanced the pen in his fingers, and stared at the words cynically. What a commotion it would cause! What food for excitement, for the hysteria

of those who cared nothing save for the self-importance it brought them in being so intimately connected with so famous a tragedy as to have been on the *same* ship where it occurred! They would remember what he had eaten for dinner that night, and quarrel over who had last seen him; and they would envelope themselves with an air of pained and morbid gloom — and cling to the gloom tenaciously because they delighted in it! What an event! And out of them all, with the exception of Henry Bliss, there was none who — ah, yes! Ironically, as the grim humour of it struck him, a smile curled Jean's lips. The stewards who had looked after him would care very much! That one might die, if one wished, was all very well; but to be inconsiderate enough to jump overboard without leaving the *douceurs* of the voyage behind, could be construed as nothing less than a personal affront! He reached suddenly into his pocket, the irony of the thought lost in a flash of inspiration, and pulled out his pocketbook. It was the one crowning touch required to stamp as a fact, beyond a peradventure of doubt, the conviction that he had made away with himself. He could ill spare any of the money; but he could much less afford to ignore anything that would lend colour to his plan and so minimise the risk of discovery! He opened the pocketbook again, took from it three of the twenty-franc notes, tucked these into his pocket, and laid the pocketbook with the balance of the money inside of it down upon the desk. It was not a fitting amount, doubtless — but there was his pocketbook and all there was in it! What more could any one give? He took up his pen, and finished his note. "Please divide what is in my pocketbook amongst my stewards. Adieu! Jean."

He folded the note, placed it in an envelope, sealed

it, addressed it to Henry Bliss, and, carrying it with him, returned to the bedroom and pinned it securely to the sleeve of his ulster. Then, taking up both the ulster and the bundle he had made of the clothes in which he had been dressed that evening, and leaving the lights turned on, he went to the outer cabin door, opened it cautiously, and peered out. Here, on the upper deck, there was no one in sight. He opened the door wide, marked the spot where the light, flooding from the room, lay across the ship's rail; then, stepping out on the deck, he closed the door softly behind him.

For a moment he stood in the darkness, looking about him, listening. There was nothing — only the ship-sounds — only the confused voices and laughter of the passengers on the deck below — only, faint-borne, the music from the ship's saloon. And then he crept across the deck to the rail; and, drawing himself back to give his arm full play, he hurled the bundle with all his strength far out over the ship's side — and as he hurled it, in requiem as it were for Jean Laparde, through the night there crashed, and boomed, and moaned, and whined anew the sullen blast of the siren.

It startled him momentarily; but the next instant he stooped and laid the ulster upon the deck beside the rail. It was perhaps fastidious in a suicide to remove his ulster, but the light from his room, when the door was opened, that would shine upon the white paper pinned on the sleeve, would disclose a sufficient motive!

It was done! In all the world now for him there was only one to share his life — a life whose future course he could not see, nor guess; but a life where, greatest of all gifts, most splendid of all splendours, was love. There was but one — only one — and that one out of all the world was she alone who cared for

Jean Laparde. And she did not know yet that he was there, that he was going to her, that he would never leave her again — but in a moment she would know! In only another moment now! Ah, he could see the pure, beautiful face shine in welcome with the gladdest light it had ever known; the great eyes, deep, true and fearless, grow dim and misty in their wondrous smile; those lips, divine in contour, lift in tenderest passion to his; her arms stretch out, no more in cruel longing, in bitter emptiness, but stretch out — stretch out to him!

“ Marie-Louise! Marie-Louise! ” — like a prayer, softly, he breathed her name; and, thrilled, eager, his blood afire, he turned from the rail, and ran to the deck companionway.

Barring a possible encounter with a ship's officer who might stop and question him, he would have little trouble in reaching the steerage deck. He was not obliged to enter any part of the ship's saloons or alleyways — he had only to descend to the deck below, and from there it was but a half dozen steps to the head of the ladder with its little sign “ passengers forbidden ” that led directly to the steerage deck. True, it was possible that some of the steerage passengers might notice him descending the ladder, but they would be too far away and it was too dark for them to see his face from any distance; and to them, in any event, unaccustomed to question, it would mean nothing more, if indeed they gave it any thought at all, than some one of the ship's crew in the ordinary performance of his duty.

At the head of the companionway Jean stopped to assure himself that the saloon passengers were still avoiding the wet, unsheltered portion of the deck beneath; and then, descending quickly, he stole across the deck-space below, gained the second ladder, and, boldly now, but with the swift agility born of the fishing days

of Bernay-sur-Mer that any seaman might have envied, swung himself down to the steerage deck. And here, almost leisurely, he turned, and, seeking the darkest shadows, and so disappearing from the sight of any of the steerage passengers who, still huddled about the deck, might have noticed him, he stood motionless, close up against the ship's superstructure. It was perhaps an exaggerated precaution; but it would preclude the possibility of any one of them connecting him, when he eventually went amongst them, with the man who had come down the ladder and presumably had disappeared in some, to them mysterious, where all was mysterious, recess of the ship.

His heart was pounding, he could feel the hot blood flush his cheeks, as his eyes strained through the gloom and semi-darkness, searching the deck. Was she still there — somewhere? Surely, surely she had not yet gone below! For then it would be very hard, perhaps impossible, to find her until to-morrow, and he could not wait so long as that; for it was to-night that he was to take Marie-Louise in his arms again, and hold her there, and stand, they two, and look into each other's eyes, glad, beyond any gladness else, in the love that God had given back to them. To-morrow? No! To-night! To-night! It must be to-night! Surely she was still here! Yes — who was that, whose form he could just make out in the darkness at the ship's side far along the deck?

He moved quickly now, still keeping in the shadows, until he reached the side of the ship furthest away from the ladder by which he had descended, and then stepped out across the deck. He passed little knots of people, and voices in strange tongues that he had never heard before fell upon his ears; but he gave them no heed — there was only that figure, alone, apart, toward which

he was hurrying. And now — yes — he was sure! Her back was turned, and, as before, she was leaning over the ship's side, but — yes — yes — it was Marie-Louise!

He halted a yard away from her, trembling with an emotion that brought a strange weakness to his limbs, and reached out his arms — her name quivering, low and passionate, his soul in his voice, upon his lips.

“ Marie-Louise! ”

She turned sharply, in a frightened, startled way, and for a moment stared at him; and then, even in the darkness, he could see her face grow deathly white, while her hand groped blindly out behind her for support.

“ Dead! ” she whispered. “ I was praying to the *bon Dieu* for you, Jean. And now you are dead, and you have come to me.”

“ Ay! ” he cried blunderingly in his joy. “ Ay, that is true, Marie-Louise! Jean Laparde is dead! ”

She moaned a little, and shrank back, and pressed her hands to her face.

“ Dead! ” she whispered again. “ You are dead, Jean, and you have come to me.”

She was swaying as he caught her in his arms. Fool, accursed fool, that he had not understood!

“ No, no; Marie-Louise, *chérie, ma bien-aimée!* ” he said tenderly. “ See, are my arms not real about you? See, it is I, it is really I! It is not death, it is love that has brought me! See, Marie-Louise, lie very still for a little while in my arms, and you will not be any more afraid.”

It seemed as though for a space she were in a faint, so white her face was, so quiet she lay; and then her hand felt out and touched his shoulder, and his face, and his hair in a wondering, hesitant, incredulous way.

Her lips moved.

"You — you are like Jean as he used to be before he went away to the *grand monde*."

He bent his head, and laid his cheek against her cheek.

"Yes, Marie-Louise," he said softly. "And now I shall always be that Jean. Try very hard now to understand, little one! See, I am back again — for always — for always — and I will never go away from you any more. Don't you see, *petite*, that it is really Jean?"

"Yes," she said, in a low, dead voice, "it is Jean; but how can it be Jean — here — on this great ship — when Jean, I know, is in France — for I left Jean in France."

And then Jean laughed — because it would help to drive the sense of unreality from her mind, and because in his heart was only joyous laughter.

"It is very simple, that! I came with Monsieur Bliss and mademoiselle. And it is no more strange for me to be here than for you — than that I should have seen you a little while ago from the deck up there, Marie-Louise."

She seemed to rouse herself as though in dawning comprehension, raising herself a little in his arms.

"But the clothes — those clothes that you are wearing!" she faltered.

"Ah, Marie-Louise!" he cried out happily. "Do you not remember? Was it not you who told me that day that I was to keep them with me always? And see, I have kept them — and they have brought me back to you!"

He felt her tremble suddenly, and draw away.

"Let me go, Jean." And, as he released her, she stood for an instant clinging to the ship's side, her head turned away, before she spoke again. "You —

you put them on to come down here to me?" she said dully, at last.

"But, yes! But, yes! What else?" he answered eagerly. "To come to you, Marie-Louise!"

She faced him, pitifully white.

"Oh, Jean, Jean! Why did you do it?"—it was a bitter, hopeless cry. "What good could this hour bring to you, what could it give you when you go back there that you have not already got, while for me"—her voice broke—"it was so hard before—so hard before, and now—"

She did not understand! She did not understand! He caught her hands.

"It is not for an hour!"—his voice was ringing, vibrant, glad. "It is not for an hour, Marie-Louise, it is for—always—always! I am not going back. I have come for always—to be with you always now, Marie-Louise, as long as we shall live. Look up, Marie-Louise! Look up, and smile with those wondrous lips, and put your arms around my neck, and lay your head upon my shoulder, for there is none here to see or heed."

She did not move; and, as she stood there staring at him, the colour came into her face—and went again, leaving it as white and drawn as it had been before.

"You are not going back"—she scarcely breathed the words. Then, almost wildly: "Jean, what do you mean? Your life, your work, your—"

"Are yours, my Marie-Louise," he said quickly. "It was that I meant when I told you Jean Laparde was dead."

"Mine! You would do this—for me—for me—Jean?"—it was as though she were speaking to herself, so low her voice was, as she leaned slowly toward him. "For me?" she said again; and in a

tender, wistful way took his face between her hands, and looked a long time into his eyes while her own grew dim. "You are very wonderful, and big, and brave, and strong, Jean," she whispered presently; and there was a little quickened pressure of her hands upon his cheeks, and then they fell away — and she shook her head. "But it can never be, Jean — it can never be. You must go back."

"Never be!" Jean echoed — but now there was a sudden fierce triumph in his voice. "It *must* be now, for there is no other way. I cannot go back! Have I not told you that Jean Laparde is dead? Listen, listen, Marie-Louise, my little one. Up there I have destroyed all traces of myself, and in a little while they will find the note I left, and believe that I have thrown myself overboard. Ah, Marie-Louise, when I saw you here to-night — see, you were standing down there with your arms stretched out! But how can I tell you — the joy, the grief, the *misérable* I had been? But it was only you then — you, Marie-Louise, my Marie-Louise again! And I must show you it was true that my life should be yours, that I knew at last all else against your love was nothing, that I had been as some sick soul wandering, deluded, in a world of phantom things — ah, I do not say it well, Marie-Louise, but you must read my heart, and out of that great love of yours forgive. And I must make you believe — my beacon! Do you remember that? My beacon! Ah, Marie-Louise, for a little while I lost it in the darkness and the storm, but now it is bright again, and it shall always burn for me. And so, see, I have come; and it is the long past back again, and the between is gone, and it is again as the night old Gaston died, and you and I, Marie-Louise, are alone together in all the world."

“Jean! Jean!” she said brokenly — and turned away her head, and, leaning there, buried it in her arms. When she looked up again her face was wet with tears.

He held out his arms to her, and smiled.

But now again she shook her head; and, as her lips quivered, gently pushed his arms away, and took one hand of his in both her own.

“Jean, it is not too late,” she was trying bravely to control her voice. “You must go back. The *bon Dieu* has given you a great life to live, and a great work to do — the work you love.”

“It was not the work that I loved — it was Jean Laparde,” he said, with a bitter laugh. “But now, I tell you again, Jean Laparde is dead.”

“There is your life and there is your work,” she went on, as though she had not heard him. “And, Jean — Jean, I have seen them both, and — and so I know.”

“You have seen them!” he repeated in a puzzled way. “What is that you say?”

“Yes,” she said. “Jean, it was I who went to your studio that night. It was I that Monsieur Valmain saw enter there. I had a cloak and hat that Father Anton had given me that had belonged to Mademoiselle Bliss.”

“You?” he cried out, in wild amazement.

“Wait!” she said tensely. “It does not matter if you know now, since you have seen me here; and I am telling you because — because I must make you understand that I know what your life is there in the great world, and how the name of Jean Laparde is honoured, and how now, more than ever before, Jean, you belong to France — and that you must go back — and that this

can never, never be, Jean — and that I can never let you do this thing."

He stared at her for a moment and could not speak. It was Marie-Louise who had been at the studio that night! There was bewilderment upon him; and there was something of finality in the gentle voice that swept the laughter from his heart, and brought a cold, dead thing there in its place. And then a sudden, eager uplift came.

"You were there that night!" he said swiftly. "What brought you there, Marie-Louise? What brought you there — to Paris — from Bernay-sur-Mer?"

She did not answer.

"Ah, I know! I know!" he cried out joyously. "It was your love, Marie-Louise — your love that brought you there. And so you love me now, Marie-Louise — and how then can you talk of sending me away?"

"I have always loved you, Jean," she said simply. "It is because I love you that I must not let you do this thing."

"And it is because I love you that I *will* do it!" he burst out passionately. "Marie-Louise, you were there that night! But is that all? You do not say it, but perhaps you are thinking of Mademoiselle Bliss. You have seen her? She knew you were there? That you were in Paris? You knew that we —"

"She told me that you were to be married, Jean," Marie-Louise interrupted quietly. "But it is not of her that I am thinking."

"She does not love me, I do not love her — *voilà!* There is the end of that!" Jean flung out his arms. "It is the work then? Well, listen, Marie-Louise, to

a wonderful secret that came to me to-night. It is you — you — your eyes, your face, your lips, your beauty, that has made the name of Jean Laparde! It is you that I have been modelling all this time — it is you who have been my model — you, my Marie-Louise! And I in my blind conceit did not realise it, and dreamed that I was creating out of my own genius the true, perfect, glorious womanhood of France — and it was you! You did not know that, my little one!”

“I am not that, Jean,” she said steadily. “But I knew that night. Monsieur Valmain, when he saw me, when I stepped out into the studio and you — you were lying there on the floor, Jean — Monsieur Valmain said so. And afterwards, Mademoiselle Bliss said so too.”

“Monsieur Valmain! Myrna! The others too — they all saw you there! They knew! Ah!” — he cried, a gathering fury in his voice. “Ah, I begin to understand Myrna’s sudden desire for a voyage to America! There was to be no chance that we should meet, you and I, Marie-Louise! *Nom de Dieu*, I begin to see — many things! And you, meanwhile — how did she get rid of you? She made you leave Paris, eh? You were to go away!”

“It was what I must do. It was not mademoiselle who made me,” she answered. “I was sick for a little while, and then I went away. Oh, Jean, can you not see what I have been trying to make you understand? I had no right even to have *risked* your seeing me, and I had meant that it should never be possible again — and so — and so that is why I am here. And now you have come to-night, Jean! It is very, very strange, and — and ” — her voice was breaking again, despite the brave efforts at self-control — “but it cannot change anything — and you must go back — to

France — and to your work. Go, Jean; go now, or I — I must go, because — because —"

"Marie-Louise!" — it was like some panic fear at his heart. "Marie-Louise — you do not mean that?"

"There is no other way," she said.

"But it is you who do not understand!" he told her frantically. "My work! Can I not still work anywhere — anywhere where you and I can live our lives together, anywhere so that the world cannot come between us again? Somewhere in America and we will begin a new life together. And is it not you that I need for that work? Is it not you that I must have if I am to work at all?"

"I was not with you, Jean, in Paris," she said, and tried to smile, "and yet all the world knows the name of Jean Laparde." She held out her hands. "I am going now, Jean — and you must go back to that world. It was so grand and big, Jean, for you to do what you have done to-night — but there is *to-morrow*. Jean, dear Jean, in your great loving impulse you have not counted that. You could not live without the world you have come to know. You think you could to-night, because to-night there is only love; but to-morrow all that you would so splendidly have thrown away would begin to call to you again, and it would grow stronger and stronger, and you could never forget, and misery would come."

"You do not believe me?" — it was like some cruel amazement upon him. "You do not believe me? It is because once I thought those things greater than your love! And you do not believe me now, Marie-Louise!"

"It is because I will not let you spoil your life that I am going," she said slowly; "it is because I must

make you understand that I will not let you do this thing; because you must, and I must make you — go back.” She stood an instant looking at him, the dark eyes wide and tearless now, the lips parted bravely in a smile — and then she turned and walked from him along the deck.

“Marie-Louise! No!” he cried out hoarsely, and stepped after her. “I will not go back, Marie-Louise! I will never go back! It is done! Marie-Louise! Marie-Louise!”

She did not answer him until she had reached the head of the steerage companionway that led below — and then for a moment she paused.

“All your life, Jean,” she whispered, “you will be glad of what you have done to-night, because it was so brave a thing to do; and it will make you a better man, and I am no more afraid, as once I was, that you will forget that it is the *bon Dieu*, and not yourself, who has made you great. And after a little while you will be glad too that I — that I have gone.”

She was gone! He stood there in a numbed way. She was gone! He could not seem to realise that. Go back! Go back — and leave Marie-Louise! Only that one thing was clear out of his dazed and staggered consciousness. He would not go back! He would never go back! To-morrow, ay and the to-morrows all through life, Marie-Louise would find him there!

He raised his head suddenly, and turned and looked behind him. High above on that upper deck there seemed a strange confusion — and on the moment, from the bridge shrilled out an officer’s whistle. Then, from deep down within the ship, the engine-room bell sounded in a muffled clang; and an instant later dark forms were scurrying around one of the lifeboats; and

now there were shouts, the creak of tackle — and the vibration of the ship was gone.

He moved back along the deck to stand close below the rail of the main deck where, oblivious to the damp and wet now, the passengers in low-necked gowns, in evening dress, the dance forgotten, were crowding, jostling and pushing each other in mad excitement.

A dozen voices spoke at once.

"Somebody has fallen overboard! . . . Who is it? . . . Who is it? . . . How did it happen? . . . Who is it? . . . Who is it? . . ."

Jean's brows gathered in perplexed, strained furrows. Myrna and Monsieur Bliss had made their discovery of course, that was evident; but to stop the ship, to lower a boat when it was obviously absurd, when they had every reason to assume that his body by then must be miles astern! What was the meaning of that?

The ship was silent, still, motionless now, save for the tumult of the excited passengers; the lifeboat dropped into the water and rowed away — and then a queer smile flickered on Jean's lips. Ah, yes! It was Myrna — mistress of every situation! Her fiancé as a *suicide* was impossible; an *accident* of course was quite another thing — that was only deplorable! She and her father had influence enough with the captain, in whom no doubt they had confided what they believed to be the truth, to induce him to carry out, for the benefit of the passengers and all else on board, the semblance of accident, and the attempt at rescue; and, besides, as far as the captain was concerned, was it not the great Laparde, the most famous of his passengers, who was involved — whose name was to be preserved from infamy and dishonour? He shrugged his shoulders. What story had that clever brain of Myrna's devised to fit the case? Had she *seen* the accident itself?

“Who is it? . . . Who is it?” cried the passengers above him. “How did it happen? . . . Who is it? . . . Who is it? . . .”

And then a voice above the others, breathless with importance:

“It was Jean Laparde! He was up on the deck above with Mr. and Miss Bliss. He dropped his cigarette-holder, it rolled across the deck and went outside the rail, where the boats are, you know, and the ship lurched as he stooped to pick it up, and —”

“And so, you see, Marie-Louise,” completed Jean to himself, in whimsical wistfulness, “and so, you see, Marie-Louise, that Jean Laparde is dead.”

— XII —

AT THE "GATEWAY"

WHAT confusion, what noise, what bewilderment — tugs pulling and snorting as they warped the great liner into her berth; orders shouted; the cries of passengers leaning from the upper decks to the knot of people gathered on the pier below; and, distant, like the muffled roll of a drum, the roar from the city streets!

Marie-Louise clasped at her little bundle of clothing timidly. For hours she had stood there on the crowded steerage deck; for hours she had strained her eyes toward the land, and then at the mighty city unfolding itself as the liner steamed up the harbour. And she had gazed long, too, at that majestic, towering figure on the little island that had evoked such strange emotions from all these people around her — a figure whose fame must be very great, for of these, who could not read or write, who were ignorant and poor, who came from so many, many lands, none, it seemed, even to the little children, but knew and reached out their arms to it, some laughing in hysteria, and some with tears, but all with the one word upon their lips that neither dialect nor tongue confused — liberty!

It was that they had come for, these Czechs of Moravia, these Croatians, these Slovenes from the Austrian provinces of Carinthia and Styria, these Lith-

uanians and Magyars; it was that, too, that had brought these Jews from a score of lands where the blessed cross that Father Anton had taught her to adore symbolised neither love nor rest for them. How many stories of oppression, and cruelty, and hopelessness had she listened to on the voyage from such as she could understand? It was not the dream of money alone that brought them; it was because, they had told her over and over again, that here they had heard was the land of freedom, that here they could work with no tyranny to rob them of their toil or of their souls, that here they were to know happiness because here was liberty.

How they laughed, and talked, and sobbed, and whispered around her now! How they crowded, and pushed, and swayed in their excitement! How eager some were, how dazed and frightened were others! What a riot of colour and strange dress the women and the men wore! How they clung to their bundles, as instinctively she clung to hers!

What did it mean, that word — liberty? She too, had come for liberty. She, too, had fled from her native country; she, too, had fled to seek freedom from the scenes and memories that were there. That day when she had gone so blindly to the *Gare St. Lazare* and a train had taken her to Havre, that day when she had no thought of any definite place to go save that she must first of all leave Paris and then go far away, it had seemed like an answer to her perplexity when, in Havre, she had seen the sign in the window of the steamship office about the ship sailing for America from there. And she had bought a ticket; and then — and then that night, here, here on the ship, Jean had come to her.

Her lips quivered suddenly, and her eyes filled with

tears. None, none but the *bon Dieu* and herself knew how near she had come that night to yielding to her love; none else knew how through that brave, splendid act of Jean's her love had seemed suddenly a thousand-fold greater, making it that much the harder to deny, as it pleaded with her to answer the cry of her soul. Oh, it had been so hard, so hard before to let Jean go, to send him from her — but that night when she had turned from him here upon the deck it had been as though she were walking out into some cold, dread place of eternal darkness, where there was no life, no living thing, and all was utter desolation. Why — why had she done it? She had asked herself that a thousand times in the days since then, in the nights when she had lain sleepless in her bunk; and yet, even while she asked, the answer was always present, always there, repeating itself over and over again — Jean had not realised what he was doing, Jean had not realised what he was doing. It was like Jean, so like the big, brave Jean of the old days to give his all on the impulse of the moment, and never a thought to what it might mean in the afterwards. That was why she had sent him away that night — that was why. She would not have been strong enough to have done it for any other cause. She had only been strong because of the bitter regret, the misery that would have come when he began to realise, even with a few hours of the hardships of the steerage, what he had lost — he who would have come from comfort, from refinement to where even soap and water were luxuries; to food that he could not eat, dealt out of huge kettles into dinner pails; to where there was little light and the air was foul; to where like cattle in a pen they slept two hundred in a compartment; to where, instead of servants at his beck and call, there was cold, brutal contempt —

and oftentimes a curse; to where, even to her, who had not known the luxuries of Jean's life, it had brought dismay! Yes; in a day of this, even in a few hours of it, with its terrific contrast, he would have known, and — and his love, great as it must have been to have prompted his impulse to the sacrifice that he had tried to make, would not be strong enough to compensate for what he had lost, to make him happy. And so — and so she had sent him back. And the *bon Dieu* had been very good to her to give her the strength to do it, for she had been right, and she had known Jean better than he knew himself. She had been right; it had been only impulse, stronger than himself for the moment, that had brought him to her, only impulse — for he had gone back. She had not seen him since that night, not even a glimpse of him amongst the passengers on what little of those decks above that she could see, though she had looked whenever, safe from observation herself amongst a crowd of the steerage passengers, she had ventured out on deck. She would have liked to have asked about him, but who was there to ask? To the steerage the life of the great ship was as a thing apart; no news, nothing came to the steerage — sufficient to the steerage was the babel of its own hundred-tongues.

She brushed the tears angrily from her eyes. She should be glad and thankful that she had not been unfair to Jean, that she had not taken advantage of that moment of impulse to so tremendous a sacrifice; she should be glad, not sorrowful — and yet it was not easy to be glad when the pain in the heart was always there, and there was loneliness that would not let her spirits be gay or bright. Liberty! What did it mean, that word — liberty? She had left her native land to seek it — and what she had found so far could only

make the memories keener, add to them, and bring a greater sadness.

About her every one was talking, some boisterously, some whose cheeks were wet, some who swore valiantly, some as though they prayed; but all eager, all expectant, all with that word "liberty" continuously upon their lips. It meant that, throughout all the remote places of Europe, in the mountains, in the valleys, in the plains, in the towns and villages of countries she had never heard of before, this great new land of America was known, and meant — liberty.

She wondered if it could be true, if this could be a land of magic that transformed all bitterness and misery into sunshine and song. She wondered if the dreams of all these strange creatures who had come from so many different worlds to this one because its name was liberty would find their dreams realised — if there might not be for some a cruel awakening that would be more than they could bear. This woman who stood beside her, old before her prime, who was very dirty, who was so queerly dressed, who crooned incessantly to the child in her arms — what dreams was she dreaming, what hopes had she, what was it that this new land was to bring to her? And then a great, tender wave of pity swept Marie-Louise. They had been standing there so long! And how drawn and weary the woman's face was, and how her arms must ache!

"Give me the baby for a little while," she said — and placed her bundle at her feet, and took the child in her arms.

And now the confusion around her and about the ship increased. They had come alongside an enormous shed; and, though she could not see, she was sure from the noise and commotion that the rich passengers

were getting off. But it was well that she could not see. She was glad of that. Jean would be amongst them, and she could not have helped looking, and — and to have watched him go and know that it was for the last time, would have been but to torture herself beyond her strength.

She was very tired, for still they were kept standing there for so long, long a time, until her arms too ached, and the child grew leaden in its weight. Then the woman took the baby back again, and said something that Marie-Louise could not understand — but the touch of the brown hand as it patted gratefully on her arm brought a quick mist to her eyes, because it was human, a human touch, and out of all the strangeness around her, out of her loneliness it seemed so priceless a thing to win.

And then there came harsh, strident commands, and the press around her, carrying her with it, began to surge forward; and presently she found herself inside the shed on the pier — and then it was like the deck of the ship again, for she stood and waited so long and so interminably. Why did they still have to wait? It could not be here that one must be examined before one could go out into those streets whose rumble and noise was louder now! Some one on board, a man who knew a few words of French, who had made the voyage before, had told her that every one must be examined; only he had said it was in a vast hall where there were two big American flags that hung out over it from the gallery, and that men sat at high desks at the end of long rows of benches, and that one was towed to it in droll-looking barges that had two decks and were all closed in like arks. So it could not be here — that place! And then, more attentive to the details about her, she remembered the *octroi* when she

had entered Paris from Bernay-sur-Mer. One's things too must be examined — and she opened her bundle until one of the men with uniforms should have come and looked at it.

After that, she waited again; and then she was carried forward once more with the movement of those about her; and, passing out of the shed, was crowded onto a barge such as the one that the man on the ship had described to her.

And then here again they waited; for all these people could not get on one barge, even though it held so many and was so closely packed — and there were other barges to be filled. She could not see very much, for she was in the centre of the crowd on the barge's upper deck, and could only occasionally obtain a glimpse through the little windows that were in rows on each side — but, at last, she could tell by the motion that they had started.

There did not seem to be quite so much talking, or chattering, or confusion now. It was as though, hanging over all these people, had come a subdued sense of disquiet and trepidation, the sense of some ordeal to be faced, vaguely grasped, save that it loomed ominously, an unknown, perhaps impassable barrier erected against the fulfilment of their hopes; and men and women alike were nervously beginning to handle the white cards with the big red figures on them, which every one had attached to his or her clothing.

Marie-Louise found herself involuntarily doing the same — staring at the little punch-holes along the bottom edge of the card that the doctor on the ship had put there, one for each day. And there was her name written there at the top — "Marie-Louise Bernier." And underneath it, "Paris" — for she had given that as her last residence, because in this new country none

was to know that she had come from Bernay-sur-Mer. For who could tell what these people here might not do? They might write to Bernay-sur-Mer, and then all her efforts would have been in vain, for some one in Bernay-sur-Mer would write to Father Anton, and — the card dropped from her fingers, and dangled by its string from the button of her blouse.

The hot, scalding tears were in her eyes again. Memories! Always memories!

On the faces of those around her, so many of them anxious now, was written the question that lips in so many different languages were whispering to each other.

“Will they let me in? What will they do? Will they let me in? Will they let me in?”

Liberty — for them! Yes, they would go in, as she would go in — and some of them, perhaps many of them, would find what they had sought. But she — even here in this strange country, where she could understand no single word that was spoken, where, surely, now that Jean was gone again, there would be nothing, no familiar scenes to come to her to revive those memories — could she find liberty in some day learning to forget?

It did not seem so now, for it seemed as though all her strength, her resistance had gone out from her that night in her struggle to send Jean away, and that it had not come back again. Why — oh, why had the *bon Dieu* sent Jean upon that ship? It had been so cruelly hard before! It did not change anything that he was in the same country, for he would not stay long, and the country was so many times bigger than France that they were utterly separated, but it was making it so hard to be brave now — so much harder — so much harder! And then suddenly she lifted her head proudly, even

though the lips would still quiver, and though the lashes of her eyes were still wet. What was it, that old and simple faith, that her Uncle Gaston in his rugged, honest way had taught her? Yes, the words came back, and they came now like a benediction to send her on her way with hope and comfort — "to love God and be never afraid."

She kept repeating that to herself all the rest of the way — until she was leaving the barge again, and, with the hundreds of her fellow-passengers, still so curious a sight to her in their many costumes, began to file in through the doorway of a huge building that was red-roofed and had towers. And here, once inside, they went very slowly at first, for they must pass between railings one at a time, while the doctors looked at each in turn. This frightened her a little, but they did nothing more to her than to stamp her card; and then, after that, there was a big, broad staircase — and then, as she climbed to the top, the vast hall was before her, with its many rows of benches, and its two great flags hanging out from the balcony, that the man had told her about.

What a buzz of noise — so many voices; the constant, shuffling tread of feet; the cry of an infant; the stir and movement of such a crowd of people! And the sounds, floating upward, seemed to form themselves into a strange, humming echo that was forever swirling around and around at the roof of the hall over the gallery. It bewildered her. A man in uniform — there were so many men in uniform! — spoke to her. She did not understand; but somehow, nevertheless, she found herself seated on one of the long benches that ran nearly the whole length of the hall.

For a little while she remained quiet, staring down at her bundle that she had placed upon the floor. And

then, as her confusion and bewilderment gradually passed away, she began to look around her. She had never imagined that any hall could be so big — it was bigger even than that place with the marble staircase where she had seen the great reception to Jean. How many hundreds would it hold? Still the people who had been with her on the ship kept coming up the stairs, and still the benches were not nearly filled!

She turned and looked in the other direction, to where, quite close to her, for she was almost at the head of the line, an officer sat at a high desk, with one of the passengers standing before him. And there were many of these desks, each with an officer seated at it, just as many as there were rows of benches, for there was one at the head of every line; and behind these there was an open space beneath the gallery; and against the wall of the building there were some little railed-off enclosures; and doors that were constantly opening and shutting, one of which, at least, seemed to lead into a corridor; and, too, there was another wide stairway, down which some of those who had come with her were already passing.

Her eyes came back to the inspector at the head of her own line, and she watched him eagerly, as he kept writing all the time he talked to the man who stood in front of him. It would be her turn in a moment. What was he doing? What was he saying? And then, as she watched, the man in front of the inspector swung a large, ungainly valise to his shoulder, and passed behind the desk, and crossed the open space beyond, and went down the stairs.

There was only one more now before her — another man. Her heart began to pound rapidly. She was not afraid of the inspector at the desk; she was not afraid that he would refuse to let her through — why

should she be? It was not that — it was only that the moment had come now when she was to go out into this new land, and face new conditions where even the language was unknown to her, and — and begin her life over again. It was only that this moment seemed so big with finality — the threshold between the future and the past.

It was her turn now. Mechanically she took up her bundle, and stepped to the desk. "To love God and be never afraid" — she was saying that to herself again.

"Your name?" demanded the inspector. He spoke in French, in quick appreciation of her nationality.

"Marie-Louise Bernier," she answered in a low voice, her eyes on the bundle in her arms.

"Your age? And" — he added kindly — "do not be nervous."

She raised her eyes to smile gratefully back at him — and then, with a cry that rang and rang again through the immense hall and stilled all else to silence, she flung herself madly past the desk, and ran across the open space behind it.

"Jean! Jean! Jean!"

A figure, grimy, dirty, disreputable, whose hands were manacled, rose, with an answering cry, from within one of the railed-off enclosures.

"Jean! Jean!" — she had reached him now, and was sobbing, clinging to him. "Jean — you — here! These things on your wrists! And your face is so white, Jean! Jean, Jean, what does it mean? Jean —"

And then she was conscious of a rush of men, and hands were upon her trying to tear her away — and then, with a strength that was greater, that seemed to

mock at the strength of all these hands that snatched at her, she was whirled off her feet, and Jean, towering there in all his great might, snarling like some beast at bay, was between her and the others.

“*Let her alone!*” — Jean’s steel-locked wrists and clenched hands were raised above his head. “Let her alone!” — his voice was hoarse, low with a murderous fury. “I’ll kill, do you understand — with these” — he shook the steel bracelets on his wrists — “I’ll kill — the first man — that tries to take her away!”

Before the white, livid face, the passion in the mighty, quivering form, they fell back instinctively; and for an instant that tense, bated silence fell again upon the hall — and then a child cried peevishly — and then a voice spoke authoritatively.

She did not understand what was said; but she was clinging to Jean again, and the crowd of men in uniform were going away, leaving only one or two near them.

“What was it? What did he say?” she asked wildly.

“That there must be something in common between us — and to bring us both together before the special inquiry board,” he answered mechanically — and because he could not spread his hands apart, he laid them, still trembling with the fury that had been upon him, both together on her shoulder, and drew her to him.

It terrified her, the sight of those manacles on his wrists. Why — why were they there? What were they going to do with him? What was this inquiry — was it to send him to prison?

“Jean, what is it?” she whispered piteously. “What does it mean? What are they going to do with you?”

“I do not know,” he said, and smiled at her. “I

only know that for a little while at least you are here with me again."

"Jean — answer me!" she cried out in her fear.

"But I do not know what they will do," he said again. "I am a stowaway. They caught me that night on the ship when I was trying to find some place to sleep — and, *pardieu*, they were not too gentle until one or two were hurt! — and then they made me work my passage in the stokehole."

It seemed so hard to think! Some wonder, that was a glorious wonder, was in her heart.

"You — you did not go back, Jean; I — I thought you had gone back, Jean" — it was as though she were telling, in a low, whispering way, some great, glad, joyous thing to herself. And then there came a sudden whiteness to her face, but her head was lifted bravely until her eyes met his. "Jean, tell them!" she said steadily. "You must tell them now who you are. Tell them, Jean, and they will let you go."

"Tell them now!" Jean cried — and shook his head, and drew his shoulders back. "Tell them — *now!* Did I tell them that night, Marie-Louise? Look!" — he thrust out his handcuffed wrists before him. "Is this not proof, Marie-Louise, that I will never tell them, that I will never go back — alone? If the world is ever to hear of Jean Laparde again, it will be because he has won back the only thing he has to live for — you — you, Marie-Louise, my little Marie-Louise. I told them my name was Jacques Legault — and Jacques Legault I will always be until you have made Jean Laparde live again, until — until — you are his wife — as in God's sight you have been, Marie-Louise, since we were little children, as in God's sight you were when I swore that oath to Gaston as he died, as in God's sight you have been though I was a traitor

to that oath. Look, Marie-Louise! Look at these things again, these irons on my wrists, are they not proof that there is nothing now, that I will have nothing, that I will know nothing but your love? Ah, Marie-Louise, once you said that I belonged to France, and you bade me go alone and work; and I forgot France, and love, and there was only Jean Laparde, and I forgot the God that gave the gift — but now, Marie-Louise, look up into my face and answer, shall I work this time for France and you and love, or shall I never work again? Marie-Louise, see ” — his voice broke in its passionate pleading — “ they are coming! Marie-Louise, do you not know now that there is only you — only you, Marie-Louise — for always? ”

She did not answer. They were taking Jean, and taking her somewhere now. She walked almost blindly. Jean had not gone back that night, and — and those things on his wrists were proof that — that he would never go back. Proof that, whatever might happen now, whatever he was going now to face, whatever they might do with him, the choice he had made that night was made for all his life; that she, even if she would, could not alter it now — proof that his love was so great and wonderful and strong and big that nothing could bend or break or shatter it — proof it was a love so pure that it had risen in sacrifice so high as to make a glory of the years when he had forgotten it! Yes; she knew now! Her heart, and her soul, and the *bon Dieu* told her so! What was it he had said that night on the ship — that even in those years she had been his inspiration? Yes; she knew that, too, for she had seen it, and others had seen it. It was true! And he had said that he would never work again — never do that great, wondrous work of his again — alone — without her — never return to it —

without her. And he had said that the *grand monde* that once had taken her place in his life, the *grand monde* in which she could have no part, was of the past now — the past to which he would never return — no matter what she did or said now — to which he would never return.

They were in a corridor; and from the corridor they entered a room, where there were three men seated in a row at desks. These men began to talk amongst themselves; but it was only when an interpreter, who was also present, put questions to Jean that she could understand anything.

"To love God and be never afraid" — she tried to think of that again, tried to say it over and over. But she *was* afraid. There was terror; and, besides terror, there was that new wonder in her soul — and, mingling, they brought confusion upon her, and at first even the words in her own tongue conveyed no meaning, and possessed for her only an unnatural sense of familiarity. And then, in snatches, she began to catch the drift of what was going on around her — a stowaway in any case was almost invariably deported . . . undesirable for other reasons . . . murderous assault upon one of the crew when he was discovered . . . his outburst of fury and threat of attack upon the officers only a few moments ago . . . medical examination . . . stab wound in side barely healed . . . a vicious character. . . .

The wound! The wound in Jean's side! She had forgotten that! It brought a sharp cry to her lips, that caused them all to turn and look at her. But she did not care. What if they looked! She was looking at Jean — looking at the gaunt, white, haggard-faced giant, who smiled and shrugged his shoulders to every question that was put to him. His wound —

barely healed! What must those days and nights of torturing, brutal work in the stokehole of that ship have meant to him — and she had thought so pitiful a thing as an hour of the coarse food, the paltry misery of the steerage, would have made him falter and regret!

They kept on questioning him — but she was not listening now. Her soul was whispering to her: “It is Jean; it is Jean; Jean that you love; Jean that you have loved all your life, all your life, who has done this for you. It is Jean who has lived through black hours where only a courage and a heroic love, so splendid and so true that it will last while life will last, has kept him from the single word, the single act that could so easily have brought back to him again everything in the world — save you.” Her eyes were filling with tears. It was Jean — Jean — Jean — who had done this for her. Jean who stood there with irons upon his wrists — for her. Jean who had —

“Who is this woman?” the interpreter demanded abruptly of Jean. “Is she any relation to you?”

There was no answer — save only in Jean’s eyes, as he turned and looked at her.

“Tell him, Marie-Louise,” Jean’s eyes seemed to say. “Tell him, Marie-Louise, for it is you who must answer now — for always.”

“You, then,” the interpreter asked, addressing her. “Are you any relation to this man?”

She felt her face grow very white.

“You must tell the truth,” the interpreter cautioned sharply. “It is evident on the face of it, from what happened out there in the hall, that there is something between you. Tell the truth for your own sake. This man is to be deported, and he will not be allowed to come back. Do you understand that? If

he is any relation to you, say so — unless you want to be separated. Well?"

Separated! Marie-Louise raised her head a little — and looked at Jean — and at the interpreter — and at the officers.

"I" — oh, it was true; true as life was true; true as love was true; true in God's sight, as Jean had said it was true; true because all through the years to come, through the sunshine and the storm and until death it would be true! — "I — I am his wife," she said.

"Marie-Louise!"

She heard Jean breathe her name, she heard the half sob upon his lips, she felt the cold steel of the handcuffs touch her wrist as his hand found and closed on hers — but she was looking only at the officers, hanging, her heart stilled in suspense, upon their every act, trying to read their faces where she could not understand their words. And then, involuntarily, because they told her nothing, because the seconds as they passed were as eternities, she flung out her hands to the interpreter.

"What are they saying? What are they saying?" she cried imploringly.

But it was Jean who answered — and his voice was lifted as though in song, radiant, triumphant, deathless.

"You are to be sent back to France, Marie-Louise, Marie-Louise — with me."

— XIII —

DAWN

STRANGE noises! The myriad voices of the ship talking one to another — the creak and grind of girders and stringers; the grunting, faintly from far above, of the wooden superstructure; the whine and complaint of the deck-beams as the vessel lurched to the sea; the sibilant hiss and whir of the racing screws lifting from the water; the swift infuriated response of the unfettered engines, chattering angrily, as it were, in wrath for the scurvy trick played upon them; the eternal dull, moaning throb, throb, throb from everywhere, that seemed finally to absorb these voices unto itself and stand as spokesman for them all. Strange noises — a medley of pain, of travail, of strain, human almost in its outcry, seeking relief from unendurable effort and distress.

For days and days they had talked like that, and Jean had listened — listened through the watches of the day and night, listened through the hours of his own toil and pain, and the cursings of the raw-boned, wizened apparition that came and went through the murky gloom of the bunker, and croaked continually like some ill-omened thing for coal, coal, coal, lifting a brutal fist at times to enforce the words. But, too, as he had listened, through the plaint of this strange medley had come the lilt, underlying all, of another refrain that all these voices seemed to sing — a refrain that found a deeper echo in his own soul, that seemed

to make the kin between him and these inanimate things the closer, a refrain of hope, a refrain in which lay immortal happiness.

“In five days . . . in three days . . . in one day more we shall reach France, France, France — and the end of strife — France — and the end of strife.”

And now that refrain was changed again, and it made his heart leap, and he laughed out in pure joy, as he swept the great sweat beads from his forehead.

“To-day — to-day — *to-day* we shall reach France — reach France — reach France!”

Over yonder through the murk of the dimly lighted bunker, through the swirling coal dust, another trimmer shovelled his barrow full of coal, and then the wheel *clacked, clacked* over the steel deck plates, and steel rang against steel as the barrow was whipped over on its side to send its load tumbling down the chute to the boiler-room below — but Jean’s own barrow lay idly for a moment beside the black, mountainous heap of coal, and his shovel hung idly in his hand.

“To-day — to-day! France, and the end of strife!” — how joyously the voices trilled in his ears! “France, and life to begin anew! France — and Marie-Louise! France, and —”

“You damned loafer!” snarled a voice beside him — and quick, with the words, a stinging blow fell upon Jean’s face.

It was the raw-boned, wizened engineer — the man above all others who was responsible for his, Jean’s, presence there in the bunker again on this return voyage to France — the man who had made of the voyage a living hell. Marie-Louise’s money, her attempt to pay his passage back and save him from this had counted for nothing — against this man. Two trimmers had deserted almost on the hour of sailing — he,

Jean, was lawful prey — a stowaway being deported — and there had been a vicious smirk of satisfaction on the man's face, reminiscent of Jean's unruliness that night on the outward voyage when he had been discovered, as the engineer had claimed him for one of the vacancies.

The shovel clanged on the steel plates of the deck as it dropped from Jean's hands. He whirled like a flash, and, grasping the engineer by the shoulders, lifted the other off his feet, and held him as powerless as in the clutch of an iron vise; held the other off at arms' length in his mighty strength to wriggle impotently; held the other there — and laughed out with that wondrous surge of joy that was upon him.

"I will not hurt you!" cried Jean — and laughed in a big, glad way. "I am too happy! See, I will not hurt you! I am too happy! Do you know what it is to be happy? To love everything — to have your heart singing, singing all the time! Ah, if you could but know! But, go now — for see, I will not hurt you! I am too happy!" — and laughing again, he released the man.

The engineer stood for an instant gazing at Jean. Happy! This great giant of a man, in torn clothes, the sweat rolling furrows down the grime-smeared face — this man, a stowaway on the voyage out — this man, deported from America — this man, forced to work here on the voyage back, who was to be treated, and had been treated like a dog — this man — *happy!* Happy! Was the man mad? The engineer, muttering in his amazement, wondering and dazed and awed at the strength that had made of him a puny thing, edged away, and disappeared in the gloom.

Two little incandescents burned yellow from the stanchions overhead — there was no other light.

There was nothing but the choking swirl of the coal dust, the rasp of the shovels, the clack of the barrow wheels, the clang as they were dumped — and the voices that told of France, and life, and love, and joy again.

“To-day — to-day!” — how the words rang in his heart and soul and mind like some silver-throated clarion call!

To-day, when the shores of France should loom in sight, the last of all barriers between Marie-Louise and himself would be swept away forever. There, on Ellis Island, they had kept him and Marie-Louise apart; and here on the ship again, the same ship that had brought them out — “guests” of the company that was forced by the government to return them to France — they had seen each other little. For, though it had not been as on the outward voyage when he was held a prisoner and closely watched even when he was off duty, and though he was now at least as free as any of the crew, it had only been at odd moments snatched here and there, usually in the early morning hours while it was still dark and he had gone off watch to the steerage deck, and she had come up from below to meet him, that he had seen Marie-Louise — that was all, the very little when their souls cried out for so much, that they had been together.

But what did it matter now? To-day — to-day all that was to be ended! To-day — how his heart leaped, and his being thrilled at the thought! — to-day they were to be together for always, to-day was to know the fulfilment of their love.

And then, too, there was another joy — the joy of a new and beautiful thing that had come into his life. The joy, pure, without alloy, unsmirched by sordid aims — the joy of work. How it brought a feverish

excitement, how his fingers tingled for the touch of clay, how he yearned to give expression to that with which his soul was now aflame, the statue of dreams, real before him now, that mighty picture, that splendid allegory that should tell his beloved France that Jean Laparde lived again — but lived a new Laparde, and, if the good God willed it so, worthy in a humble way of the great gift that was his, worthy in a glad, tender way of the love that, so steadfast and so true, so unselfish and so pure, had saved him from himself. Yes, it had come to him — come to him at last, the base of that statue that he had never been able to see before. It had come to him here in the gloom, and struggle, and sweat, and toil of this miserable coal bunker; come to him, leaving him to stand a chastened man before the picture that was held up, perfect in every detail, before his mind's eye for him to gaze upon, leaving him to tremble with emotion at the thought that he should give it to the world to see.

It was a secret yet from Marie-Louise — a secret that was to be told to-night. There were to be just they two — and — yes, Father Anton, who would be there to bless them — to know. No one else, least of all Monsieur and Mademoiselle Bliss, who would in that case come hurrying back from America. No one else to know that he lived until the dream statue was done. There was the dream statue to make, and then all France, and all the world, if it would, should know that Jean Laparde still lived; for then the world would understand why the Jean Laparde it knew — had died.

He filled his barrow, emptied it, and filled it again — and worked on — and, strangest sound of all, strange indeed for that dark, joyless place, as he worked, he sang.

Came at last, faintly, the four double strokes of the

ship's bell. Eight bells — four o'clock in the morning — the watch was ended. Jean handed his barrow and shovel to his relief, and, mounting the succession of steep, iron-runged perpendicular ladders, climbed upward from the ship's black depths, and made his way to the steerage deck.

It was dark here — with the darkness before the dawn. A fresh wind was blowing, and he put on his jacket; and, leaning over the side, watched the racing waves, and laughed at the buoyant lift of the deck beneath his feet, and threw back his head to drink into his lungs for the first time in many hours the sweet, fresh, God-given air.

“Marie-Louise! To-day — Marie-Louise! Marie-Louise!” his heart was saying.

And presently she came along the deck, and her hand stole into his. It was too dark to see her face; but her hair, truant in the wind, swept his cheek, and close to him he could feel her heart beat against his own. And as he held her there, there came upon him, softly, like some sacred presence, moving the soul of him with an holy joy, the wonder of her, and the great, immeasurable, priceless worth of the love she had given him.

“Marie-Louise,” he whispered tenderly. “Your lips, *ma bien-aimée!*”

And in the darkness she raised her face to his, and he kissed her — and suddenly he found his eyes were wet. Glad tears they were; and yet, too, a pledge between himself and God that he would hold her always as he held her now, her life and happiness his dearest trust — a pledge that in itself asked grace and pardon in contrite penitence for that pledge of other days that he had broken.

His arms were around her. God, the sorrow and

the misery he had brought to her, who had so freely laid aside her own happiness that he — that he — He drew her closer still.

“ Marie-Louise, are you happy? ” he cried out, and it was his soul that spoke, yearning, pleading fiercely for the assurance that meant all in life to him now, the assurance that alone could stand, radiant and thankful, where before, in keen, bitter pangs of remorse, had stood the memories of the past — of her betrayal.

“ Marie-Louise, are you happy? ” he cried out again.

“ I did not know that one could be so happy, Jean, ” she said softly — and her hand lifted to touch his face, and linger there, smoothing the hair back from his forehead.

They were silent for a little while in each other's arms — a deep peace, a quiet thankfulness in their hearts.

And then Jean spoke again.

“ Look, Marie-Louise! ” he said, and pointed out far over the waters to the horizon line ahead. “ It is the dawn. *Our* dawn, Marie-Louise. The dawn of the day when we shall be together always. ”

Grey it was in the east; faint and timorous streaks of light that seemed like skirmishers flung out in tentative attack upon the massed blackness of the night.

Her hands tightened about him.

“ To-day! Oh, Jean! It is like a dream — like a wonderful dream that the *bon Dieu* has brought to us. ”

He drew her head to his shoulder. Presently, when in the east that greyness should have grown pink and golden with awakening day, he would drink in the pure, glorious beauty of the sweet, chaste face, look into the dark, brave, tender eyes and read in her soul the happiness that God had restored to them; but now he could only hold her close and feel the lithe young

form against his own, and feel her heart throb against his breast.

“A dream, little one, that shall always last,” he said. “Ah, Marie-Louise, it is our dawn, our day, the beginning of a new life, *chérie*, where there shall be only love — our love, yours and mine, the love of old friends, of those we love, the love of work — ah, you shall see what that will be!” His voice thrilled suddenly. “You shall see, for now Bidelot shall have that ‘touch’ he asked for — for now I know! I know! It was you I modelled, Marie-Louise — your face, your form — and they were perfect, beautiful; but I was blind to what was most beautiful of all! I modelled only features — and I forgot the soul, for I had forgotten love, and I could not see the dearer things. I forgot the soul that should soften so tenderly and refine the courage and the resolution and the purity of that dear face of yours and make nobility divine. I forgot —”

“Jean!” — her fingers were laid tightly upon his lips. “Jean, you must not say such things! Jean, Jean, I am so far from that — so far from that!”

He could just see her face now in the growing light — see the eyes shine through a mist of happy tears, see those perfect lips quiver in their smile, as she shook her head.

“But you shall see!” he told her eagerly. “A little while in Paris — ah, Marie-Louise, that is a secret that I have for you! — a little while there, and then you shall see! And all France shall see — and France shall tell you that it is so! Ah, Marie-Louise, perhaps some day they will forget Jean Laparde; but France shall always remember one who is worthier far, and in that one see its hope, its inspiration and its glory, for France shall never forget — Marie-Louise!”

She had slipped from his arms. Her face was full of wonder, and upon it fell the soft glow of light that now was tinging the eastern sky. How pure, how brave, how beautiful she was! How love shone in the eyes that were like Heaven's stars; how the soft light seemed to caress her face and rejoice in the radiant happiness that was there, a happiness that even her wondering bewilderment for the moment seemed to enhance! How the strong, young form swung free and lithesome to the lifting deck, and found a wondrous joy in its own glorious virility!

"Jean, what do you mean?" she said breathlessly.

"You shall know!" he laughed, and laughed because there was only joy and gladness in all the world — in the waves that tumbled and frolicked and played, and tossed their white manes at each other and the ship; in the breeze that sang merrily its way along on its busy errand into the great everywhere; in the vibrant throb of the mighty ship, in that spokesman's voice — for it was to be to-day — to-day! "You shall know, Marie-Louise — to-night, when Father Anton is there to hear, and has blessed us, and made Marie-Louise my little wife! And then that little while in Paris that you will understand — and then — *home!* Ah, Marie-Louise, can you not see it now — the blue water, blue with the wonderful colour that only God can make, and the white beach where we played when we were little children, and the boats, Marie-Louise, and the brave, true, loyal friends! Home, Marie-Louise, home, home, home — to Bernay-sur-Mer! Ah, is not God good? We shall go home, *ma bien-aimée* — and there we shall live, and there I shall work for you, and France, and love, and there old Bidelot and those who really love the things we do shall come at times to make us proud and

happy! Ah, it will be a *grand monde*, Marie-Louise, a *grand monde* of wealth and riches, and a very proud *grand monde*, careful of those who shall have the entrée there — for it shall be a *grand monde* where you, my little Marie-Louise, are queen, a *grand monde* of love and happiness.”

Purple and golden and pink and crimson was the east — and over the horizon rim rose the sun. And it mounted higher, and the dawn was gone, and the day had come.

“Look!” he said suddenly.

And a cry rose to Marie-Louise’s lips; and her eyes grew dim and misty again until she could no longer see.

“It is the land! It is France!” she whispered.

It was light now, men and women were moving about the steerage deck, he could no longer hold her in his arms; but, standing there at the ship’s side, her hand was tightly clasped in his.

There were glad words on Jean’s lips:

“It is France, Marie-Louise — and home.”

— XIV —

THE STATUE OF DREAMS

FOUR months had passed. The spring had come. France mourned for Jean Laparde. Old Bidelot shook his grizzled head, and pushed away, with a curiously reproachful motion of his hand, the mass of sketches and designs that lay upon the desk before him. If France grieved for the loss of one of her most brilliant sons, the great critic of France grieved besides for the loss of a personal friend that he had loved. Of these competitive designs that he had been appointed to judge for the statue with which France was to commemorate Jean Laparde — none would do! Not one! Not one, but was so far from the genius of Jean's own work that there seemed something mocking and incongruous in the thought that it should aspire to perpetuate and typify the work of the master-sculptor who was gone!

Not one would do — and meanwhile they besieged him, those who had submitted their designs, to cast Jean's mantle upon them! They came at all hours; they waited interminably on his door-step for him to return; they buttonholed him on the streets and in the cafés to urge their claims and to explain the allegory of their conceptions, lest some subtle beauty in their work might have escaped his eye! One would not think they would do that — eh? That it was not dignified? No? Well — there was the mantle of Jean Laparde!

"*Mon Dieu!*" sighed Bidelot heavily — and suddenly raised his head at a timid knocking upon the door. Here was another of them then, no doubt! He had been wrong to let his servant take the afternoon, and leave his apartment so unguarded that his very door was at their mercy! "Well, come!" he called out, querulously — but the next instant he had risen, and was smiling, as he extended his hand. It was Father Anton. "Ah, Father Anton!" he cried. "This is a pleasure! This is a pleasure indeed! I do not often see you these days! As a matter of fact — let me see — not since Monsieur Bliss went away to America, and the evenings at his house were at an end."

"That is so," agreed Father Anton. "But then, I have been very busy; and besides, for a little while, I was in Bernay-sur-Mer."

"*Tiens!* So! But, tell me, what is the news from Monsieur Bliss? When will he return?"

"I do not know," Father Anton replied. "He has said nothing about it in his letters; but I have a letter to write him to-day, that may perhaps bring him back at once."

"Then write it, my dear Father Anton — write it, by all means!" Bidelot burst out with a vehemence that, if exaggerated, was at least sincere, as he waved his hand helplessly toward the desk. "I am in despair! I have been on the point of writing Monsieur Bliss myself."

Father Anton's eyes followed the direction of the gesture, and fixed interrogatively on the desk.

"The competitive designs," explained Bidelot. "None are worthy! It is tragic!"

But now Father Anton smiled, and shook his head, and laid his hand on Bidelot's arm.

"But Jean still lives," he said, in his gentle way. "Jean is not dead."

"It is the Church that speaks," old Bidelot answered. "I know what you mean. That is all very well, and it is also true in a material sense that men like Jean Laparde do not die; but what of the work that he had yet to do? What of that, Monsieur le Curé? Will you say that his work was finished? Then I, who went there every day, who knew so well, who looked for that final master-touch that was yet to come — I tell you, no! He had still his masterpiece before him! And then, with that achieved" — the caustic old critic's hand swept a dozen sketches from the desk to the floor — "bah, he would have no need of these in any case! — but with that achieved, then, I tell you then, that" — his hands dropped to his sides, and he shrugged his shoulders. "Ah, well, I had thought to see it before I died; and yet I, who am an old man, whose work is over, am still alive, and Jean Laparde is dead. Will you explain that, Monsieur le Curé?"

Father Anton's smile now was one of kindly amusement.

"But Jean is not dead," he said again. "It is to tell you that, that I have come."

"Hey!" cried Bidelot. He stared at Father Anton in startled and amazed incredulity. "Hey!" he cried hoarsely, and grasped with both hands at Father Anton's shoulders. "What is this you say? Are you mad, Monsieur le Curé? Not dead! You say that Jean Laparde is not dead! It is impossible! It is inconceivable!"

"And yet," said Father Anton, still smiling, "since I married him at the studio — eh? And since I am here now from him with a message for you!"

"Married! At the studio!" Old Bidelot gazed wildly around him. "My hat!" he ejaculated excitedly. "Where is my hat? I will go at once! At once! Jean — at the studio! It is not possible — but I will go!"

"Yes," Father Anton nodded, "we will go to the studio, for that is what Jean wanted you to do. But Jean himself is no longer there."

Old Bidelot, already halfway to the door, stopped abruptly and whirled around.

"Not there! Then — then what? He is not dead! He is married! He is at the studio! He is not at the studio! I do not understand! I understand nothing!"

"I will explain it all to you," Father Anton told him soothingly. "But let us go. It will take time to tell it, for it is a long story, and we can talk on the way."

"Yes — well, then! Well, then! But make haste!" Bidelot dragged at the skirt of Father Anton's *soutane*, and led the way from the apartment, exclaiming as he went. Then, as they reached the street, he caught Father Anton's arm and shook it almost as he would a refractory child's. "Now, then! Now, then — tell me!"

"But be calm, Monsieur Bidelot; I pray you to be calm!" expostulated Father Anton gently. "See" — stepping out — "I will tell you as we walk along. Well, then — listen! One night, a little over four months ago, Hector came to my rooms in such excitement that I thought he was ill. He told me that Jean had come back. Like you, I could not believe it. I hurried there — I ran. It was true! It was Jean — not like the Jean that went away; but like the Jean when you first saw him, the Jean of Bernay-sur-Mer. And with him was — ah, but what amazement! — was

my little Marie-Louise — no, Jean's Marie-Louise, for I married them there that night, and —"

"But," interrupted Bidelot, gesticulating with his hat, for he had forgotten to put it on, "but, still I do not understand! Over four months ago! And since then? Where has he been since then?"

"He has been working there at the studio in secret," Father Anton answered.

"Working! Ah! Let us hurry — faster then!" urged Bidelot eagerly. "But why has he gone away? Why did he not wait? But to-morrow — eh — to-morrow, he will be back to-morrow?"

"No," said Father Anton slowly. "I do not think Jean will come back any more to Paris."

"Monsieur le Curé," spluttered Bidelot, halting suddenly in the middle of the street, "what is the matter with you? Enough of these riddles! Jean not come any more to Paris! I can understand nothing!"

"But you would understand," said Father Anton patiently, "if only you would let me tell you. See now, listen — it is the story as Jean told it to me that night" — and, as he took old Bidelot's arm, and they walked on again, Father Anton, smiling sometimes radiantly, fumbling sometimes with his spectacles, told of the old days in Bernay-sur-Mer, of Marie-Louise, of how she came to Paris, of how Jean "died" that night at sea, and of how they came to France again.

And they were at the studio and mounting the steps, as Father Anton ended.

"And so," he said, "and so, that night I married Jean and Marie-Louise. And what days after that! If you could but have seen Jean in the joy of his work, and Marie-Louise there beside him! And I must needs go to Bernay-sur-Mer to buy back Marie-Louise's house without her knowing it, and see to the build-

ing of an *atelier* to be added to it. And — it is there they went this morning — to live.”

And Bidelot was very quiet now, and his eyes were wet.

“I understand,” he said, as Father Anton opened the door with a key. “But” — shaking his head a little — “even in Bernay-sur-Mer Jean will be famous, and the world will follow to Bernay-sur-Mer.”

“That is perhaps true, and it would be a sad thing if it were otherwise,” said Father Anton, with his rare, grave smile, “for there is a pride that is pure, and a joy like no other joy in the tribute that is paid to one for work well done. And if the world follows to Bernay-sur-Mer, it can be only to the life that it will find there, the life in which Marie-Louise has her glad place, a life that the world, as you speak of it, will never mould or change.”

They passed in across the hall, and entered the salon, and walked down its length to the portières that hid the *atelier* from view — but here Bidelot paused.

“Wait!” he said. “Tell me one thing more. Why has Jean stayed here in Paris to work in secret like this for all these months since he came back?”

“I think you will find the answer here,” said Father Anton — and, reaching out his hand, drew the portières quietly apart.

And Bidelot, with a low, sudden cry, stepped forward into the *atelier* — and after that stood still, and neither spoke nor moved.

Two life-sized figures were before him — a woman, and a man. And the woman, a fishergirl, stood as on a perilous, wave-swept ledge, and leaning forward was stretching out her hands; and at her feet, from storm-lashed waters that swirled around him, rose the head and shoulders of the man, one hand clasped in both of

hers, the fingers of the other clawing into the crevice of the rock, the muscles of the bare arm, where the shirt had been torn away, standing out like whip-cords as he drew himself to safety. And as Bidelot gazed, the studio, the surroundings, all were gone. Alone those figures — as in some mighty power that was supreme, that knew naught but itself, but in itself knew all of triumph, of defeat, of struggle, of glory, of undying love, of victory, that knew the sadness and the joys of life, its empty things and its immortal truth! And in the wind-wrapt, wave-wet clothes that clung about the fishergirl, disclosing in pure, chaste beauty the strong young limbs and form, in the torn and bleeding shoulders of the man, buffeted, near spent, there seemed to fall upon the studio the darkness of blackened skies, to come the roar of waters in turbulent unrest, the play of lightning, the roll of thunder, now ominous, now dying muttering away — and all was storm and battle and dismay and death. And then, as sunshine breaking through the clouds — a glad and perfect triumph — victory! It was in the woman's face that was rigidly set with high, unfaltering courage, yet softened as by some divine touch with a wondrous tenderness until the beautiful lips, as they panted in the struggle, smiled, and the brave, fearless eyes held trust and love; it was in the man's face, shining like some radiant glory from out the drawn and haggard features, as though the physical evidence of the torture and pain of one who had been near to death were lost in the joy and wonder of life regained — as though his soul were in his face.

It was long before Bidelot spoke.

"There are no words," he said. "It is what I dreamed and hoped that I might see."

"It is Marie-Louise — his wife," said Father An-

ton softly. "It is his statue of dreams, with the base at last that he could never see before."

There were tears upon old Bidelot's cheeks.

"I understand," he said. "It is Jean himself." He moved closer to the figures, and stood silent again. "It is a priceless thing," he said presently. "It is not himself alone; it is the womanhood of France, pure in her courage and her love, immortal in her sacrifice, that is the inspiration, the life, the anchorage, the guiding star, the hope of France itself! Ah, my friend" — the grizzled head was high, the eyes were shining with pride and a glad excitement — "I speak for this for France. All must see it — the France as yet unborn, the children when we are dead and gone who shall serve their country better for the masterpiece of Jean Laparde and the story that it tells. I go to-night! I go to-night to Bernay-sur-Mer to Jean — to speak for this for France!"

Father Anton made no answer; but he stooped and from the pedestal of the group removed the cloths that, as though they had fallen in a careless heap when the figures had been uncovered, were bedded around it. He was smiling through misty eyes, as he stood up again.

"It was the message that I had for you," he said. "Read!"

And Bidelot, bending forward, read the words that were carved there in the clay:

TO FRANCE — FROM JEAN LAPARDE

THE END





